

**THE BIBLICAL PROPHETS
IN THE QURAN**

THE QURAN: IN AN EASY-TO-
UNDERSTAND FORMAT

VOLUME 2

FAROOQ MIRZA

The First-Ever Quran Rendition

According to Specific Topics and Subject Matter

From

The Quran Foundation

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DEDICATION

The seven-volume book series about the Quran is dedicated to the memory of Muhammad Asad, whose work, “*The Message of the Qur’an*,” was the first-ever attempt at an idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Quranic message in English. In my opinion, it is the best translation and commentary on the Holy Quran.

Muhammad Asad was born Leopold Weiss in July 1900 in Lviv, now Ukraine. He was the descendant of a long line of rabbis, a line broken by his father, who became a barrister. Asad himself received a thorough religious education that would qualify him to keep alive the family’s religious tradition. He left Europe for the Middle East in 1922 for what was supposed to be a short visit to an uncle in Jerusalem. There, he came to know the Arabs and was struck by how Islam infused their everyday lives with existential meaning, spiritual strength, and inner peace. Weiss then became, at the remarkably young age of twenty-two, a correspondent for *The Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the most prestigious newspapers in Germany and across Europe. As a journalist, he traveled extensively, mingled with ordinary people, held discussions with Muslim intellectuals, and met heads of state in Palestine, Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Back in Berlin from the Middle East, a few years later, Weiss underwent an electrifying spiritual epiphany—reminiscent of the experiences of some of the earliest Muslims—that changed his mind and his life. “Out of the Quran spoke a voice greater than the voice of Muhammad,” Weiss said. Thus, it was that Weiss became a Muslim. He converted in Berlin before the head of a small Muslim community in the city. He took the name Muhammad to honor the Prophet, and Asad—meaning “lion”—a reminder of his given name, Leopold, which is derived from the Latin word for lion.

Asad spent some six years in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, where he studied Arabic, the Quran, and the “Hadith”—the traditions of the Prophet and Islamic history. He mastered the Arabic language not only through academic study but also by living with a tribe that spoke the Arabic dialect of the Holy Quran. At the age of eighty, after seventeen years of effort, he completed his life’s dream, for which he felt all his life had been an apprenticeship: a translation and exegesis, or “tafsir,” of the Quran in English: *The Message of the Qur’an*.

THE QURAN: IN EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND FORMAT

The Quran, in its present form, is not arranged according to the chronological order in which the individual passages were revealed. There is a seemingly abrupt transition from subject to subject within the same chapter, causing confusion. The Quran, in its traditional form was meant for the common people to read daily in small installments, the word of God, and ponder.

The author of this book series has rearranged *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muhammad Asad according to the specific topics and subject matter. The seven-volume Quran series is a first-ever attempt to present the Quran according to the subject matter—a new paradigm in understanding the Quran. For example, the subject of divorce is discussed in the Quran in Chapters 2, 33, 58, 60, and 65. Compiling all the verses about divorce in one place gives the reader a quick reference and a comprehensive understanding. For scholars, lawyers, and anyone who needs to study a particular issue, it would be handy to have it arranged by subject matter.

The seven volumes series covers the entire Quran. The purpose of this work is not to convert you, preach to you, or present a public relations version of Islam. It aims to inform you about true Islam.

CONTENTS

Preface – The Continuation Of Divine Revelations	1
Part 1 – The Old Testament Prophets	
Chapter 1 – God’s Judgment In This Life.....	6
Chapter 2 – Satan’s Rebellion	14
Chapter 3 – The Fall Of Adam And Eve And Cain And Able	21
Chapter 4 – Noah (Nuh In Arabic).....	28
Chapter 5 – Abraham (Ibrahim In Arabic).....	45
Chapter 6 – Isaac And Jacob	58
Chapter 7 – Lot (Lut In Arabic).....	63
Chapter 8 – Joseph (Yusuf In Arabic)	74
Chapter 9 – Moses (Musa In Arabic)	96
Chapter 10 The Sage Al-Khadir.....	159
Chapter 11 – Samuel, King Saul, And David.....	163
Chapter 12 – Solomon And Queen Sheba.....	171
Chapter 13 – Elijah (Idris Or Ilyas In Arabic), Elisha (Al-Yasa), And Jonah (Yunus)	184
Part 2 – The New Testament Prophets And The Unitarian Or Jewish Christianity	
Chapter 14 – The House Of Imran, Zachariah, And John The Baptist	190
Chapter 15 – Mary And Jesus.....	198
Chapter 16 – The Ministry Of Jesus Christ.....	205
Chapter 17 – The Problems With The Four Gospels	217
Chapter 18 – Jesus Of The Quran	222
Chapter 19 – The Death Of Jesus.....	229

Trinitarian Christianity In The Post-Jesus Era

Chapter 20 – Pauline’s Christianity	237
Chapter 21 – The Birth Of Trinity	242
Chapter 22 – The Quranic Rebuttal To Jesus Being The Son Of God.....	250
Chapter 23 – Why Christians And Magians Among The Unitarian Catagory	262
Chapter 27 – How Did Prophet Muhammad Treat Christians?	267
References.....	272

PREFACE

THE CONTINUATION OF DIVINE REVELATIONS

The second volume of this series contains all Quran quotes that refer to the Prophets before Prophet Muhammad, including the Old and New Testament Prophets. The Arabian Prophets (Hud, Salih, Ishmael, Shuayb, and Ayyub) are included in the third volume of the Quran series. The Quran does not differentiate between the Biblical and Arabian Prophets; this arbitrary division is only for description.

RASUL VERSUS NABI

When God communicates with a human being, that person is a prophet. The Arabic word for a prophet (nabi) is the same as in Aramaic and Hebrew, indicating its Semitic origin. The designation “apostle” (rasul) or messenger is applied to bearers of divine revelations, which comprise a new doctrinal system. “Messenger” includes Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. However, a “prophet” (nabi) is one whom God has entrusted with the enunciation of ethical principles based on already-existing moral principles common to all divine revelations. Hence, every apostle is a prophet, but not every prophet is an apostle.

PRISTINE MONOTHEISM VERSUS THE ATTRIBUTION OF DIVINITY TO OTHERS

The common theme runs through all the stories in the Quran that stresses the intrinsic impossibility of reconciling belief in One God, whose omniscience and omnipotence embrace all that exists, with attribution of divine or semi-divine qualities and functions to anyone or anything else. For that purpose, God sent prophets to all people on the face of the Earth, from Adam to the last Prophet

Muhammad. Islamic traditions say there were 124,000 such prophets, a symbolic figure suggesting a significant number.

UNIVERSAL DIVINE GUIDANCE

Thou art nothing but a warner, verily, We have sent thee with the truth, as a bearer, of glad tidings and a warner. There was never any community, but a Warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst. (35:23-24) Thus, Allah, the Almighty, the Wise, revealed [the truth] unto thee, [O Muhammad], and those who preceded thee. (42:3) And who believe in that bestowed from high upon you, [O Prophet], and that which was revealed before your time, for it is they who in their innermost are certain of the life to come! (2:4) And this, too, is a divine writ (the Quran), which We have bestowed from on high, blessed, confirming the truth of whatever there remains [of earlier revelations]. [This] so you may warn foremost of all cities and those who dwell around it. And those who believe in the life to come believe in this [warning], and they are always mindful of their prayers. (6:92)

Foremost of all cities (lit., the mother of all towns) is an epithet applied in the Quran to Mecca because it is the place where the first temple dedicated to One God was built (3:96) and became the Qiblah (direction of prayer). The expression “all who dwell around it” denotes all humanity. Every community and civilization has received prophetic guidance. God sent the prophets the message of joy, hope for all who listen, and warning for those who ignore its call.

Belief in all apostles constitutes the second article of the Islamic faith. Muslims believe in all the major Jewish and New Testament Prophets. This contrasts sharply with the narrow Jewish view of prophecy, where prophets only arise from their tribe. If prophets emerged among Gentiles, Jews were not God’s chosen people. This is one of the basis for Muhammad’s rejection by Jews. Christian

rejection of Prophet Muhammad is due to theological differences over the Trinity and Jesus' godhead.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

And indeed, [even] before thy time, the apostles were given the lie, and they endured with patience all those charges of falsehood, and all the hurt done to them, until succor came unto them from Us, for there is no power that could alter [the outcome of] Allah's promises. And some histories of those apostles are already known to you. (6:34) Indeed, [even aforesaid] We sent forth Our apostles with all evidence of [this] truth; and through them, We bestowed revelation from on high, and [thus gave you] a balance [with which to weigh right and wrong], so that men might behave with equity. (57:25) [As for you, O [Prophet], nothing is being said to you, but what was told to all [of Allah's] apostles before your time. (41:43)

“Before thy time” refers to one of the fundamental doctrines of the Quran: the historical continuity of divine revelation. The Prophet Muhammad was not Islam's founder. He did not start a new religion. In most stories in the Quran, the emphasis is on the continuation of divine revelations throughout humanity's moral history. In addition, the emphasis is on the illustration of ethical principles derived from these stories. Unceasing divine guidance is manifested in a long succession of God-inspired prophets.

Life—so the Quran teaches us—is a continuous, organic process—and this law also applies to man's religious experience in its cumulative sense. Thus, the religion of the Quran is better understood in the context of the great monotheistic faiths preceding it. These faiths culminate and are finalized in the universal teachings of Islam. Despite differences with earlier dispensations, the Quran is a continuation of Judaism and Christianity, with Muhammad being the last Prophet. In short, without Judaism or

Christianity, there would have been no Islam. The following are all the Prophets mentioned in the Quran:

1. Adam, 2. Idris (Enoch), 3. Nuh (Noah), 4. Hud (Eber), 5. Salih (Salah), 6. Ibrahim (Abraham), 7. Lut (Lot), 8. Ismail (Ishmael), 9. Ishaq (Isaac), 10. Yaqub (Jacob), 11. Yusuf (Joseph), 12. Ayub (Job), 13. Shuayb (Jethro), 14. Musa (Moses), 15. Harun (Aaron), 16. Daud (David), 17. Sulayman (Solomon), 18. Yunus (Jonah), 19. Ilyas (Elijah), 20. Al-yasa (Elisha), 21. Zakariya (Zachariah), 22. Yahya (John), 23. Isa (Jesus), 24. Muhammad (peace be upon him)

DOES THE QURAN REFER TO THE BIBLE?

With a different perspective than previous scriptures, the Quran is a unique religious inspiration. It always gives an independent narrative for each Biblical prophet and never refers to the Bible. This is compared to the New Testament, which frequently quotes the Old Testament to bolster its message. The authors of this volume added the Biblical references in the explanatory notes for clarity.

THE MISSION OF MUHAMMAD

Like his prophetic predecessors, the Prophet was a religious reformer. Before Muhammad, Christians and other religious groups attempted to penetrate the wall of Arabian paganism without much success. God sent Prophet Muhammad to the pagans of Mecca to bring them back to the one true God. He also brought them back to a way of life that most of his contemporaries had forgotten or deviated from. Worship of one God was not the evolutionary emergence of monotheism from polytheism but a return to a forgotten past, to Noah and Abraham's faith. Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet from Abraham's house, being the direct descendant of Ishmael, the oldest son of Abraham. Due to its universal teachings and textual incorruptibility, the Quran represents the culmination of all revelations. It offers the final, most ideal way to spiritual fulfillment.

PART 1

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Chapter 1

GOD'S JUDGMENT IN THIS LIFE

GRANT OF RESPITE

Now, if Allah took men [at once] to task for whatever [wrong] they committed [on earth], He would not leave a single living creature on its surface. However, He grants them respite for a term set [by Him]: [The end of their lives on earth]. When their term ends, then [they realize that] Allah sees all that is in [the hearts of] His servants. (35:45) Say: "Unto Allah, who has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy." (6:12) "My grace overspreads everything" (7:156).

The Quran tells us that man's life in this world is the first stage. The principle of man's moral responsibility for all his conscious actions and behavior will be judged in the afterlife. In this earthly life, the God of grace and mercy grants respite to all sinners so they can reflect and reform their ways. The exceptional quality of God's grace and mercy is further stressed in the forgiveness, graciousness, and bounteous mercy that sustains, protects, and rewards people.

WHEN AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY IS CORRUPT

But alas, among those generations [whom We destroyed] before your time, there were no people endowed with any virtue – [people] who would speak out against the [spread of] corruption on earth – except the few of them whom We saved [due to their righteousness]. Those bent on evildoing only pursued pleasures, which corrupted their whole being, and so lost themselves in sin. (11:116) And [bear in mind] there is no community which We will not destroy before the Day of Resurrection or chastise [even earlier if it proves sinful] with severe suffering: all this is laid down in Our decree. (17:58) For, thy Sustainer would never destroy a community for the wrong [beliefs alone] so long as its

people behave righteously [towards one another]. (11:117) We would never destroy a community unless its people did wrong [to one another]. (28:59)

“Suffering severe” may befall them according to the immutable laws (His decree) God has laid down for His creations. The Quran reveals a forgiving and just judge. However, a strong emphasis on God’s mercy should not conjure a permissive deity. God’s mercy exists in dialectical tension with His justice, tempered by mercy for repentant sinners. However, an exception to this rule is when the entire community is sinful and corrupt.

VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Quran further delineates the sin of violation of one's fellow man's rights (Huququl Ibad) as more repugnant in God's sight than wrong beliefs. God’s chastisement does not afflict people because their beliefs amount to shirk (attributing divine qualities to others). It afflicts them only if they persistently commit evil in their mutual dealings. They deliberately hurt other human beings by acting tyrannically toward them. The common theme of many stories narrated in this volume is a depiction of God’s judgment in this life on various evil communities.

WHEN IS DIVINE PUNISHMENT INITIATED?

1. JUDGMENT IS ONLY AFTER DIVINE GUIDANCE

Thy Sustainer would never destroy a community for its wrongdoing, so long as its people are still uninformed [of right and wrong]. For all shall be judged according to their [conscious] deeds – and thy Sustainer is not unaware of what they do. (6:131-132) Thy Sustainer would never destroy a community without having [first] raised an apostle who would convey unto them Our messages. (28:59) Every community has had an apostle. Only after their apostle has appeared [and delivered his message] is

judgment passed on them, in all equity, and never are they wronged. (10:47) And how many prophets did We send to the people during the ancient times? But there has never been a prophet who came to them without them ridiculing him. [In the end], We destroyed them [even though they were] of greater might than these. As a result, the very image of those people of old became a thing of the past. (43:6-8) We have never destroyed any community [for its wrongdoing] unless a divine writ had [previously] been made known to it. [But remember] no community can ever forestall [the end of] its term - and neither can they delay [it]. (15:4-5)

God does not take people to task for any wrong they may have committed unless they are deliberately committed in contravention of a moral law already made clear to them by the prophets. “Every community has had an apostle” stresses the continuity of religious revelation throughout humanity’s history. It also stresses that no community, period, or civilization is left without prophetic guidance in the long run.

2. TRIAL THROUGH TRIBULATIONS AND GOOD TIMES

How many evildoing communities have I given rein for a while? But then I took it to task, for with Me is all journeys’ end! (22:48) We sent Our messages to people before your time, [O Prophet], and visited them with misfortune and hardship so they could humble themselves. Yet when the misfortune decreed by Us befell them, they did not humble themselves, but their hearts grew hard, for Satan had made all their doings seem good to them. When they had forgotten what they were told to take to heart, We threw open the gates of all [good] things until - even as they rejoiced in what they had been granted - We suddenly took them to task, and lo! They were broken in spirit, and [in the end], the last remnant of those folks bent on evildoing was wiped out. (6:42-45)

3. THE LAST WARNING AND FINAL PUNISHMENT

Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We have sent an apostle [to them]. After [this has been done, and] it is Our will to destroy a community, We give Our last warning to those who have lost themselves entirely in pursuit of pleasure. They [continue to] act sinfully. The sentence [of doom] passed on the community takes effect, and We break it to smithereens. None has the like of thy

Sustainer's awareness and insight into His creatures' sins. (17:15-17) And then, when they [clearly] beheld Our punishment, they said: "We have come to believe in One God, and we have renounced all beliefs to ascribe a share in His divinity!" But their attaining faith after seeing Our punishment could not benefit them. Such is Allah's way that has always been obtained for His creatures. So, then and there, lost were they who denied the truth. (40:84-85)

The "way of God" or Sunnat Allah is the Quranic term for the totality of natural laws instituted by the Creator. This is the law that faith has no spiritual value unless it arises from genuine, inner enlightenment.

4. DESTRUCTION OF GUILTY AND SAVING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

We destroyed people like you [in the past]. Who would be willing to take it to heart? [They were genuinely culpable]. All [the evil] they ever did was revealed in the [ancient] books of [divine] wisdom. (54:51-52) In the end, We made good unto them Our Promise, and We saved them and all whom We willed [to save], and We destroyed those who had wasted their selves. [O men!] We have now bestowed upon you from high a divine writ containing all that you should bear in mind, will you not use your reason? (21:9-10)

The ancient revealed scriptures or books of (divine) wisdom (az-zubur) had made the meaning of good and evil clear to them. Still, they willfully disregarded or even consciously rejected that teaching. All those whom God did intend to save are believers; examples of being saved include Noah and his followers, Moses and Israelites, Lot and some of his family, Prophet Salih Hud, Shuayb, and others.

DIFFERENT MODES OF PUNISHMENT

[When Our chastisement befell them], they became wanderers on the face of the earth, seeking refuge. (50:36) Some of them, We let loose a deadly storm of wind, and a [sudden] blast overtook some; and some of them, We caused to be swallowed by the earth: and some of them, We caused to drown. And not Allah wronged them, but they wronged themselves. (29:40)

THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT

Can then, they who devise evil schemes ever feel sure that Allah will not cause the earth to swallow them suddenly, or that suffering will not befall them without their perceiving whence [it came]? - or that He will not take them to task [suddenly] during their comings and goings, without them being able to elude [Him], or take them to task through gradual decay? And yet your Sustainer is most compassionate, a dispenser of grace! (16:45-47) And how many a [rebellious] community We had destroyed, with Our punishment coming by night, or at noontide when they were resting! And when Our sentence came upon them, they had nothing to say for themselves and could only cry, "We were wrongdoers!" (7:4-5)

The above passages refer to the unpredictability of divine punishment. It could strike suddenly when people feel secure and at ease and are unaware of any danger that may threaten them. By "evil schemes," systems of God-denying philosophy and perverted

morality are implied. “Gradual decay” refers to a protracted disintegration of ethical values, power, civic cohesion, happiness, and life. “Your Sustainer is most compassionate,” seeing that He offers guidance through His prophets gives you time to reflect and mend your ways before you do irreparable harm to yourselves.

GOD DID NO WRONG; THEY WRONGED THEMSELVES

This account of the [fate of those ancient] communities, some of the remaining, and some [extinct like] a field mowed down, We convey unto you [as a lesson for humankind]. For, We did no wrong to them, but it was they who wronged themselves. And when thy Sustainer’s judgment came to pass, those deities they invoked instead of Allah proved to be of no avail to them. This brought them no more than utter perdition. And such is thy Sustainer’s punishing grasp whenever He takes to task any community given to evildoing: His punishing grasp is grievous, severe! (11:100-102) To those [earlier] communities, some of their stories We [now] relate unto you. There indeed came apostles of their own with all evidence of the truth. But they would not believe in anything they had once given the lie. Thus, Allah seals the hearts of those who deny the truth. In most of them, We found no [inner] bond with anything right, and most were found to be iniquitous indeed. (7:101-102)

The Quran describes God’s punishment (as well as God’s reward) for man’s doings and not an arbitrary act of God. God sets a seal upon the hearts of men for their sins.

NO ARBITRARY PUNISHMENT

Before [We condemn them to] that supreme suffering, [in the afterlife] We shall most certainly let them taste of suffering closer at hand, [in this world] so that they could [repent and] mend their ways [and return to righteousness]. (32:21) Have they never

traveled about the earth and beheld what happened to [deniers of the truth] lived before their time? Greater were they in power than they are, and they left a stronger impact on the earth and built it even better than these [are doing]. To them [too] came their apostles with all evidence of the truth: and so, [when they rejected the truth and thereupon perished], it was not Allah who wronged them, but they had wronged themselves. (30:9) Can the people of any community feel secure? Our punishment will not come upon them by night, while they are asleep or in broad daylight, while they are engaged in [worldly] play? Can they, after that, always feel protected from Allah's deep devising? But none feels secure from Allah's deep devising, except people who are [already] lost. Has it not become obvious to those who have inherited the earth in the wake of former generations that, if We so willed, We could smite them [too] for their sins, sealing their hearts so they cannot hear [the truth]? (7:97-100) Thus, We do relate to you some stories of what happened in the past. [Therefore], We have vouchsafed unto you, out of Our grace, a reminder. (20:99) And [remember:] out of all the accounts relating to the [earlier] apostles, We convey to you [only] that wherewith, We [aim to] make firm your heart. Through these [accounts] come the truth to you and a warning and reminder to all believers. (11:120)

The story of Noah, Hud, the tribe of Ad, Salih, the tribe of Thamud, Lot, Sodom, and Gomorrah, Shuayb, and the people of Madyan, the judgment upon Israelites, the Pharaoh, and Egyptians, people of Sheba and Tubba, were all punished in this life. The two reasons to relate the stories of God's judgment on sinful communities are: First, it warns the present-day sinful communities of impending disaster if they refuse to mend their ways. Throughout the ages, God's punishment can and will repeat if any community opposes the eternal moral verities. Second, to illustrate ethical principles derived from these stories and the varying reactions of men to God's guidance through His Prophets. The Quran is an ethics document. Whenever it refers to past events—whether recorded in the Bible or

alive in the Arabian tradition—it exclusively brings out moral lessons and elements relevant to its ethical teachings.

The Quran is not a historical book and does not give us a continuous, systematic narrative in chronological order when mentioning Biblical figures. An exception is the story of Joseph, described chronologically in chapter or Surah 12. Descriptions are often condensed and elliptic, omitting everything that is not relevant.

Chapter 2

SATAN'S REBELLION

DEFINITION OF SHAYTAN, SATAN, OR DEVIL

The English word “devil” is derived from the Greek diabolos, a Hellenized form of the Arabic name “Iblis” for the Fallen Angel. The Arabic term shaytan is used in the Quran in both the singular and the plural, often interchangeably with Iblis, the disobedient angel ejected from heaven for disobeying God. Iblis tempts Adam and Eve into disobedience, called shaytan. The term Iblis originates from the root-verb ablasa, “he despaired,” or “gave up hope,” or “became broken in spirit.”

CONTENTION OF ANGELS

And Lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: “I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it. They (the angels) said: “Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood—whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?” [Allah] answered: “I know that which you do not know.” (2:30)

Inherit or establish a successor or vicegerent on earth. The term *Khalifah* is used in this allegory to denote man’s rightful supremacy on earth. This is rendered by the expression “he shall inherit the earth” in the sense of being given possession of it. The symbolic contention of the angels against the creation of man was based on their belief that man “will spread corruption” on earth “and shed blood,” while the angels, by their purity, were better qualified to inherit the earth.

FACULTY OF CONCEPTUAL THINKING

He (God) imparted unto Adam the names of all things; Then He brought them within the ken of the angels and said: "Declare unto Me the names of these [things] if what you say is true." They replied: "Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! No knowledge we have, except that which Thou hast imparted unto us, and Thou alone art all-knowing, truly wise." Said He: "O Adam, convey unto them the names of these [things]." And as soon as (Adam) had conveyed unto them their names, [Allah] said: "Did I not say unto you, I alone know the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth and know all that you bring into the open and all that you would conceal?" (2:31-33) Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided them sustenance out of the good things of life and favored them far above most of Our creations. (17:70)

God "imparted Adam the names of all things" and endowed man with abstract thinking and logical definitions. Abstract thinking is the ability to consider concepts beyond what we observe physically. Recognizing patterns, analyzing ideas, synthesizing information, solving problems, and creating things all involve abstract thinking.

God has favored man above all other creations by bestowing upon him the faculty of reasoning to discern between true and false. This makes him superior to all other animate beings and even to angels. Thus, God's allegorical command to the angels was to "prostrate themselves" before Adam.

PROSTRATE BEFORE ADAM

And lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to create mortal man out of sounding clay, out of dark slime transmuted; and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, you fall before him in prostration!" (15:28-29) "Behold, I am about to create a human being out of clay, and

when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, you fall before him in prostration!” (38:71-72) Yea, indeed, We have created you and formed you, and then We said unto the angels, “Prostrate yourselves before Adam!” (7:11)

"We have created you" (i.e., brought you into being as living organisms) "and then formed you" (or given you your shape, i.e., as human beings). The sequence of these two statements brings the fact of man's gradual development: in the personal sense, from the embryonic stage to full-fledged existence and the evolution of humanity as such.

THE ORIGINAL SIN: ARROGANCE

Said He [God]: “O Iblis! What has kept you from prostrating yourself before this [being], I have formed with My hands? Are you too proud [to bow down before another created being], or are you of those who believe [only] of themselves as high?” Responded [Iblis]: “I am better than him: Thou hast created me out of fire. It is not for me to prostrate myself before the mortal man whom Thou hast created out of clay!” (38:75-76) “It is not for me to prostrate myself before the mortal man whom Thou hast created out of sounding clay, out of dark slime transmuted!” (15:32-33) Iblis, who refused and gloried in his arrogance: and thus, he became one of those who deny the truth. (2:34) Iblis: he [too] was one of those invisible beings but turned away from his Sustainer’s command. Will you then take him and his cohorts as masters instead of Me, although they are your foes? How vile an exchange between evildoers! (18:50)

God asks Satan, “Are you too proud to bow down?” This is only rhetorical since God is omniscient. You have created me out of “fire” superior to man's "clay." Iblis' contempt for Adam underlies Satan's role as an open foe to the entire human race.

The term “sounding clay” adds a further dimension to the concept of man’s evolution out of clay, dust, water, etc. In the Quran, sounding clay “that emits a sound” when struck is used exclusively regarding the creation of man. It seems to contain an allusion to the matrix of man’s physical body and the power of articulate speech, which distinguishes man from all other animal species, as well as to the brittleness of his existence (see the expression “like pottery” in verse 55:14). The sounding clay has evolved out “dark, fetid mud” or “dark slime,” both “altered” in its composition and “brought into shape,” hence the rendering of this expression as “transmuted.”

GRANT OF RESPITE TO SATAN

[God] said: “Down with you from this [angelic state]—for it is not proper for you to show arrogance here! Go forth, and among the humiliated, you shall be! (7:13)

You are [henceforth] accursed, and [My] rejection shall be your due until the Day of Judgment!” (15:34-35) He [Satan] added: “Tell me, is this [foolish being] the one whom Thou hast exalted above me? Indeed, if Thou wilt but allow me a respite until the Day of Resurrection, I shall most certainly cause his descendants—all but a few—to obey me blindly!” [God] answered: “Go [the way thou hast chosen]! But as for those who shall follow thee behold, hell will be the recompense of you [all], a recompense most ample. Hence, lure them with your voice, and bear on them with all your horses and your men. Be their partner in [all sins relating to] worldly goods and children and hold [all manner of] promises to them. And [they will not know that] whatever Satan promises them is only meant to delude the mind. [And] behold, thou shalt have no power over [such of] My servants [who place their trust in Me]: for none is as worthy of trust as thy Sustainer.” (17:63-65)

“The phrase “obey me blindly” literally reads to put a rope around a horse's lower jaw to lead it. The grant of respite to Iblis implies he can tempt man until the end of time.

Said [Iblis], “Then, O my Sustainer, grant me a respite until the Day when all shall be raised from the dead.” Answered He: “So be it: you shall be among those granted respite until the Day when the time whereof is known [to Me alone].” (15:36-38) [Whereupon Iblis] said: “Now that Thou hast thwarted me, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straightway. I shall most certainly fall upon them openly and in a manner beyond their ken and from their right and left. And most of them Thou wilt find ungrateful.” (7:16-17)

“Now that Thou hast thwarted me,” resulting in the loss of my former position among the angels. The phrase “from their right and left” refers to all directions and by all possible means. “**All your horses and all your men**” is a metaphor for enticing men into sinful acts in all imaginable ways, including the begetting of children through fornication or adultery. However, in Islam’s ethics and canon law, no moral stigma or legal disability attaches to the child thus begotten. Man’s deliberate choice of a morally wrong course is almost invariably due to his exaggerated attachment to worldly pleasures. Satan (or Iblis) uses these attachments to induce men to forgo all moral considerations and ruin their spiritual lives.

SATAN HAS NO POWER OVER MAN

[Whereupon Iblis] said: “I shall indeed make [all that is evil] on Earth seem goodly to them and shall most certainly beguile them into grievous error [all] and save such of them, as are truly Thy servants!” (15:39-40) Said He [God]: “This is, with Me a straight way: verily, thou shalt have no power over My creatures - unless it be such as are [already] lost in grievous error and follow thee [of their own will]: and for all such, behold, hell is the promised goal with seven gates leading into it, each gate receiving its

allotted share of sinners.” (15:41-44) Go forth from here, disgraced and disowned! ” [And]as for those who follow you, I will most certainly fill Hell with you all!” (7:18)

The servants are so profoundly conscious of God that no blandishment by Satan can lead them astray. Of all creations, man enjoys a unique relationship with God, for after creating Adam, God breathed His spirit. This exclusive selection and status led to Satan’s rebellion, a story that strikingly conveys humankind’s cosmic significance. The essence of human uniqueness lies in one’s vocation as God’s representative on earth. Based on how this viceregency is executed, a person will be rewarded or punished. Here, “Adam” represents the whole human race.

Before Allah, it prostrates itself, all that is in the heavens and on earth. Every beast that moves, and the angels: [even] these do not conceive of themselves with false pride. They fear their Sustainer high above them and do whatever they are ordered to do. (16:49-50).

The Quran’s phrasing of God’s command to the angels and Iblis’ refusal to obey clarifies that he was indeed one of the heavenly hosts at the time. Hence, we must assume his rebellion has a purely symbolic significance and is the outcome of a specific function assigned to him by God.

God has willed that Iblis (or Satan) should tempt man but have no power to seduce those truly conscious of God. Those who chose to follow Satan are among those lost in grievous error. The Quran clarifies that Satan fulfills a specific function in God’s plan despite his ostensible rebellion against his Creator. He is the eternal tempter who enables man to exercise his God-given freedom of choice between good and evil, and thus, man is endowed with moral free will. Satan will address his erstwhile followers on Judgment Day:

And when everything has been decided, Satan will say: “Behold, Allah promised you something bound to come true!” I, too, held

out [all manner of] promises to you—but I deceived you. Yet I had no power over you. I called you, and you responded to me. Hence, blame not me but for yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to react to mine: for, behold, I have [always] refused to admit that there was any truth in your erstwhile belief that I had a share in Allah’s divinity. (14:22)

Chapter 3

THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE AND CAIN AND ABLE

GARDEN OF EDEN

We said: "O Adam, you shall dwell with your wife in this garden and eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish; but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers." (2:35)

We said: "O Adam! Verily, this is a foe unto thee and thy wife: so, let him not drive the two of you out of this garden and render thee unhappy. Behold, it is provided for thee that thou shalt not hunger or find yourself naked or suffer from the heat of the sun." (20:117-119)

There is a considerable difference of opinion among commentators about what the garden means. A garden in the earthly sense, or paradise that awaits the righteous in life to come. According to some of the earliest commentators, the garden is an earthly abode, an environment of perfect ease, happiness, and innocence.

Adam and Eve became conscious of their nakedness only after their fall from grace. It is logical to assume that the words "find **yourself naked**" have a spiritual significance, implying that man would not feel bare despite the absence of clothing in his original state of innocence.

THE TREE OF ETERNAL LIFE

[Satan said:] "O Adam! "Shall I lead you to the tree of life eternal and to a kingdom that will never decay?" And so, the two ate [of the fruit] thereof. They became conscious of their nakedness and covered themselves with pieced-together leaves from the garden. And [thus] Adam disobeyed his Sustainer, and therefore he did fall into grievous error. (20:120-121) Satan whispered unto the

two to make them conscious of their nakedness, of which [hitherto] they were unaware, and he said: “Your Sustainer has but forbidden you from this tree, lest you two become [as] angels, or lest you live forever.” And he swore unto them, “I am of those who wish you well indeed!” And thus, he led them on with deluding thoughts. (7:20-22)

The Quran (20:120) refers to the same symbolic tree as the Bible's (Genesis 2:9), the tree of life and knowledge of good and evil. Satan instills in them the desire to live forever and become, in this respect, like God. This tempts Adam and Eve into disobeying God, resulting in loss of innocence. Man's desire for immortality on Earth implies a wishful denial of death and resurrection and, by implication, of the ultimate reality of the hereafter, life to come (al-akhirah). Satan insinuates that man can become the master of a kingdom that will never decay. In other words, to be free from all limitations and thus, ultimately, even from the concept of God—the only idea that endows human life with real meaning and purpose.

ORIGINAL SIN OF ADAM AND EVE

And their Sustainer called unto them: “Did I not forbid that tree unto you and tell you that Satan is your open foe?” The two replied: “O our Sustainer! We have sinned against ourselves—and unless Thou grant us forgiveness and bestow Thy mercy upon us, we shall most certainly be lost!” Said He: “Down with you [and be henceforth] enemies unto one another, having on Earth your abode and livelihood for a while: there shall you live.” He added, “And there shall you die, and thence shall you be brought forth [on Resurrection Day]!” (7:22-25)

“Down with you,” or down from this state of blessedness and innocence. As in the parallel account of this parable of the Fall above in 2:35-36, the dual form of address changes at this stage into the plural, making it clear that the story of Adam and Eve is an allegory of human destiny.

GOD'S GUIDANCE FOR ADAM AND MANKIND

Thereupon, Adam received words [of guidance] from his Sustainer, and He accepted his repentance: for He alone is the acceptor of repentance, the Dispenser of Grace. [For although], We did say, "Down with you all from this [state] there shall, nevertheless, most certainly come unto you guidance from Me: and those who follow My guidance need no fear, and neither shall they grieve. Those who are bent on denying the truth and giving the lie to Our messages. They are destined for fire, and therein shall they abide." (2:37-39)

A PLAIN WARNING

[Say, O Muhammad:] "No knowledge would I have of [what passed among] the host on high when they argued [against the creation of man], had it not been revealed unto me [by Allah]—to no other end than that I might convey [unto you] a plain warning." (38:69-70)

GOD CONSCIOUSNESS AS PROTECTION FROM SATAN

O Children of Adam! Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from high [the knowledge of making] garments to cover your nakedness and to be a thing of beauty. But the clothing of God-consciousness is the best of all. Herein lies a message from Allah so that man might take it to heart. O children of Adam! Do not allow Satan to seduce you in the same way as he caused your ancestors to be driven out of the garden. He deprived them of their garments [of God-consciousness] to make them aware of their nakedness. He and his tribe are waiting for you where you cannot perceive them! We have placed [all manners of] satanic forces near to those who do not [truly] believe. (7:26-27)

The symbolism of Adam and Eve becoming conscious of their nakedness after the fall has a spiritual significance. It was the loss

of the garment of God-consciousness that made man's ancestors aware of their nakedness, the realization of utter helplessness and dependence on God.

NEGLECT OF SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

Indeed, long ago, We imposed Our commandment on Adam; but he forgot it, and We found no firmness of purpose in him. (20:115)

The present passage shows that neglect of spiritual truths is one of humanity's recurrent characteristics, symbolized by Adam. His forgetting God's commandments is due to insufficient firmness of purpose in ethics, which is evidence of humanity's moral weakness. ***Allah wants to lighten your burdens: for man has been created weak. (4:28)*** This explains man's dependence on unceasing divine guidance.

DO NOT FOLLOW SATAN'S FOOTSTEP

[Remember that] when We told the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam," they all prostrated themselves, save Iblis. He [too] was one of those invisible beings, [or angel], but he turned away from his Sustainer's command. Will you then take him and his cohorts for [your] masters instead of Me, although they are your foes? How vile an exchange on the evildoers' part! (18:50)

THE DIFFERENCE IN THE FALL STORY BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND THE QURAN

According to the Quran, Adam, not Eve, is tempted by the devil. The woman is not portrayed as the cause of the Fall, as in Judeo-Christian traditions. It is an act of disobedience for which they, and they alone, are responsible. Unlike Christianity, there is no notion of an inherited "original sin" committed by Adam, for which the entire humanity suffers. Sin is not a state of being. It is an act of disobedience—failure to do or not do what God commands or prohibits. Human beings are not sinful by nature but instead created

weak and subject to temptation by Satan. Death follows the human condition and is not due to sin or the Fall. Sin's consequences, like human responsibility, belong solely to sinners. The above description of sin and human responsibility is consistent with the Torah teachings.

THE PARADIGM OF SIN AND REPENTANCE

Biblical and Quranic stories about the Fall's consequences reveal the basis of Christianity and Islam's divergent doctrines. The former views the Fall as the cause of man's flawed nature and existence; the latter finds the story of sin, God's mercy, and repentance here. In the Bible, the Fall brings shame, disgrace, and hardship. The Quran teaches that Adam disobeyed God but repented, and God extended mercy and guidance. Adam turned away from Satan and sin and turned back to God; Adam repented, and God forgave, and this is the paradigm for sin and repentance in Islam.

ANIMAL-LIKE STATE TO CONSCIOUS HUMAN BEING

In the earlier state of innocence, the man was unaware of evil and the necessity of choosing between the many possibilities of actions and behaviors. In other words, he lived, like all animals, by instinct. However, this primitive, childlike innocence was only a condition of his existence, not a virtue; it gave his life a static quality. It precluded him from moral and intellectual development. The growth of his consciousness, symbolized by the willful act of disobedience to God's command, changed all this. It transformed him from a purely instinctive being into a full-fledged human entity as we know it, capable of discerning between right and wrong and thus choosing his way of life. In the allegory of the Fall was not a retrogressive event but a new stage of human development: the opening of doors to consider moral consideration. By forbidding him to "approach this tree," God allowed the man to act wrongly—

and, therefore, rightly. So, man became endowed with moral free will, which distinguishes him from other sentient beings.

SATAN’S PROMISE IS DECEPTIVE

Realizing that Adam and Eve did not achieve immortality despite tasting the forbidden fruit, Satan's suggestion proved to be just as deceptive as always. The Quran says nothing about the real nature of that “tree,” beyond pointing out that Satan falsely described it as the tree of immortality. We may assume the forbidden tree is simply an allegory of the limits the Creator has set to man’s desires and actions—limitations beyond which he may not go without offending against his God-willed nature.

DEVELOPMENT OF FREE WILL AFTER THE FALL

The superiority of humans over animals is his ability to free himself from slavery to the base desires characteristic of an animal-like existence, thus liberating him from the yoke of sin into a higher spiritual life. The Quran argues that everyone is a free moral agent capable of making choices by exercising his will rather than acting only by compulsion or instinct. Therefore, each human being has the fundamental freedom to make ethical decisions and choose a life of moral integrity.

ABEL AND CAIN

MURDER OF ABEL BY CAIN

Cain was Adam and Eve's first-born son. Abel was the second son.

Convey unto them, set forth the truth, the story of the two sons of Adam—how each offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them. Whereas it was not accepted from the other. [And Cain] said: “I will surely slay you!” [Abel] replied: “Allah accepts only those who are conscious of Him. Even if you lay your hand

on me to kill me, I shall not lay my hand on you to slay you: I fear Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds. I am willing, indeed, for you to bear [the burden of] all the sins ever done by me and by you. You would be destined for fire since that is the punishment for evildoers!" But the other's passion drove him to slay his brother, and he slew him, and thus, he became one of the lost. Allah sent a raven, which scratched the earth to show him how to conceal his brother's naked body. [And Cain] cried out: "Oh, Woe is me! Am I then too weak to do what this raven did and conceal my brother's naked body?" And he was smitten with remorse. After this, We ordained unto the children of Israel that if anyone slays a human being—unless it is [in punishment] for murder or spreading corruption on Earth—it shall be, as though he slew all humanity. Whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he saved the lives of all humankind. (5:27-32)

“Convey on to them” (to the Bible followers) the story of Cain and Abel mentioned in Genesis 4:1-16.

The thought of burying his dead brother's body, suggested to Cain by the raven's scratching the earth, brought home the enormity of his crime. The moral truth here explains why Cain and Abel are mentioned in this context. The expression “We have ordained unto the children of Israel” does not, of course, detract from the universal validity of this moral; instead, it refers merely to its earliest enunciation. The murder of Abel also meant all his descendants ceased to exist, thus “slaying all mankind.” The murder of a human being is more than killing just one person; it includes his future progeny.

Chapter 4

NOAH (NUH IN ARABIC)

The story of Noah and the destruction of his erring fellow men is the first example of how a sinful community must pass through five steps before divine punishment is inflicted.

Biblical Noah hardly communicated with his people, and that deficiency is remedied in the Quran. Noah had an extensive dialogue with community leaders and the public in the Quran.

WORSHIP GOD ALONE

We sent Noah to his people, [saying]: “Warn your people before grievous suffering befalls them!” [And Noah] said: “O my people! I am but a plain warner to you, [sent to tell you] that you should worship Allah [alone] and be conscious of Him. Now pay heed unto me, so that He may forgive you some of your sins, and grant you respite until a term is known [to Him alone]. When the term appointed by Allah does come, it can never be put back—if you but knew it!” (71:1-4)

The seventy-first surah is devoted in its entirety to Noah’s preaching to his erring fellow men. This surah symbolically depicts every conscious believer’s struggle against blind materialism and the resulting lack of spiritual values. Noah’s failure to reform his people occurs in the Quran several times and most extensively in 11:25-48. “Until a term,” namely, until the end of each person’s life, implying that God might forgive sins after repentance and change of heart until the end of one’s life. The unrepentant sinner would, therefore, be fully accountable for his behavior at death.

THE EXISTENCE OF A CONSCIOUS CREATOR

AND INDEED, [it was with the same message that] We sent forth Noah unto his people: "Behold, I come unto you with the plain warning that you may worship none but Allah - for, verily, I fear lest suffering befall you on a grievous Day!" (11:25-26) [Noah said]: "What is amiss with you that you cannot look forward to Allah's majesty, seeing that He has created [every one of] you in successive stages? Do you not see how Allah has created seven heavens in full harmony with one another? He has set up within them the moon as a light [reflected], and the sun as a [radiant] lamp? And Allah has caused you to grow out of the Earth in [gradual] growth, and after that, He will return you to it [in death]: and [then] He will bring you forth [from it] in the resurrection. And Allah has made the earth a wide expanse for you so that you might walk on spacious paths." (71:13-20)

Noah's people lost sight of all the manifold evidence of the Creator's uniqueness and thus, all gratitude for the innumerable blessings He bestows upon man. The "successive stages" refer to a process of gradual evolution in the mother's womb, from a fertilized germ-cell (the female ovum) to the point where the embryo becomes a new, self-contained human entity. It points to the existence of a plan with purpose and, hence, to the presence of a conscious Creator.

"God has caused you to **grow out of the Earth**" has a twofold meaning. It alludes to the evolution of the human body from the same organic and inorganic compounds found on Earth. And it enlarges upon the creation of the human individual "in successive stages" referred to above. Secondly, it alludes to the evolution of the human species, which, starting from the most primitive organisms living on Earth, has gradually ascended to ever higher stages of development until it has finally reached that complexity of body, mind, and soul evident in the human being.

OBJECTIONS TO NOAH'S TEACHINGS

DEFINITION OF A BELIEVER

They [people of Noah] answered: "Shall we place our faith in you, even though [only] the most abject [of people] follow you?" Said he [Noah], "What knowledge could I have as to what they were doing [before they came to me]? Their reckoning rests with my Sustainer: if you could understand [this]! Hence, I shall not drive away [any of] those [who profess to be] believers; I am nothing but a plain warner." (26:111-115)

And I shall not repulse [any of] those who have attained faith. Verily, they [know that they] are destined to meet their Sustainer, whereas, in you, I see people without any awareness [of right and wrong]! And O my people, who would shield me from Allah, was I to repulse them? Will you not, then, keep this in mind? And I do not say unto you, 'Allah's treasures are with me,' nor [do I say], 'I know the reality beyond the reach of human perception,' nor do I claim I am an angel, nor do I say of those whom your eyes hold in contempt. 'Never will Allah grant them any good'—for Allah knows what is in their hearts. [Was I to speak thus], I would indeed be among the evildoers." (11:29-31)

The unbelievers' contemptuous statement that Noah's "abject" followers had declared their faith in him, not out of conviction, but to gain material advantages. The unbelievers might lend an ear to Noah (implied here) if he would but rid himself of those low-class people. Noah's answer embodies a cardinal principle of Quranic ethics and Islamic law. No human being has the right to judge another person's faith or hidden motives. Only God knows what is in men's hearts. Society may judge only by external evidence, which comprises a person's words and deeds. Thus, if anyone says, "I am a believer," and does not act or speak contradicting his professed faith, the community must consider him a believer.

According to the histories of later prophets, especially Jesus and Muhammad, most of their early followers were slaves, the poor, and the oppressed. The divine message promised an equitable social order and the hope of happiness in the hereafter.

YOU ARE LOST IN ERROR

The most prominent ones among his people replied: “We see you are obviously lost in error!” Said [Noah], “O my people! There is no error in me. The Sustainer of all the worlds has sent me as an apostle. I am delivering my Sustainer’s messages and giving you sound advice: for I know [through revelation] from Allah what you do not know. Why do you deem it strange that a tiding from your Sustainer should have come unto you through a man from among yourselves? This is so that he might warn you, and you might become conscious of Allah, and you might be graced with His mercy?” (7:60-63)

LIAR OR A MADMAN

But the great ones among his people, who refused to acknowledge the truth, answered: “We do not see in thee anything but a mortal man like ourselves. We do not see that any follow thee save those who are the most abject among us, and that you could be in any way superior to us. On the contrary, we think you are liars!” (11:27) They [the great one] added: “This [man] wants to be supercilious to you! For, if Allah had willed [to convey a message unto us], He would surely have sent down angels. [Moreover], we have never heard [anything like] this from our forebears! He is nothing but a madman: so, bear with him for a while.” (23:24-25)

The Quran implies that people often reject a new ethical proposition that conflicts with their habitual thoughts and ways of life. It means a condemnation of all blind *taqlid*, i.e., an unthinking acceptance of religious doctrines or assertions not unequivocally supported by divine revelation or prophetic teachings.

NOAH'S REPLY

Said [Noah]: “O my people! What do you think? If [it be true that] I am taking my stand on clear evidence from my Sustainer, who has vouchsafed grace from Himself— [a revelation] to which you have remained blind. [If this is [true], can we force it on you even though it be hateful to you? And O my people, no benefit do I ask of you for this [message]: my reward rests with none but Allah. (11:28-29)

The phrase “can we force it on you?” refers to the cardinal Quranic doctrine that “there shall be no coercion in matters of faith” (2:256). The often-repeated statement that a prophet is no more than a warner and bearer of glad tidings implies his duty consists only in delivering the message entrusted to him. The plural “we” in this sentence refers to Noah and his followers. “Your eyes hold in contempt,” i.e., the poor and abject followers of Noah.

THREATENING NOAH WITH PHYSICAL HARM

Said they: “Indeed, if you desist not, O Noah, you will surely be stoned to death!” (26:116) [Noah said]: “O my people! If my presence [among you] and my announcements of Allah’s messages are repugnant to you—well, in Allah have I placed my trust. Decide, then, what you will do [against me], and [call to your aid] those beings to whom you ascribe a share in Allah’s divinity. Once you have chosen your course of action, let no hesitation deflect you from it; and carry out against me [whatever you may have decided], and give me no respite! Even so, if you turn away [from the message I bear, remember that] I have asked no reward whatever of you: my reward rests with none but Allah, for I have been bidden to be among those who have surrendered themselves unto Him.” (10:71-72)

THOSE WHO UNITE AGAINST THEIR PROPHETS

None but those bent on denying the truth would question Allah's messages. But let it not deceive you that they seem to do as they please on Earth: to the truth gave the lie, before their time, the people of Noah and, after them, all those [others] who were leagued together [against Allah's message-bearers]; and each of those communities schemed against the apostle sent unto them, aiming to lay hands on him; and they contended [against his message] with fallacious arguments, to render void the truth thereby: but then I took them to the task - and how awesome was My retribution! (40:4-5)

NOAH'S COMPLAINTS TO GOD ABOUT HIS PEOPLE'S INTRANSIGENCE

[And after a time, Noah] said: "O my Sustainer! I have been calling my people night and day, but my call has only caused them to flee farther and farther away [from Thee]. And whenever I called unto them with a view to Thy granting them forgiveness, they put their fingers into their ears, and wrapped themselves up in their garments [of sin] and grew obstinate and became [yet more] arrogant in their false pride. And I called them openly and preached to them in public; and I spoke to them secretly, in private; and I said: ask your Sustainer to forgive you your sins- for He is all-forgiving! He will shower upon you heavenly blessings abundant, and will aid you with worldly goods and children, and will bestow upon you gardens through which running water flows." (71:5-12)

“Heavenly blessing” or lit., “He will let loose the sky over you with abundance.” The final two blessings mention the state of happiness in the hereafter, symbolized in the Quran as gardens through which running waters flow.

DEMAND FOR JUDGMENT

[The great ones] said: “O Noah! You have contended with us in argument and have [needlessly] prolonged our controversy: bring upon us, therefore, that with which you have threatened us if you are a man of truth!” He answered: “Only Allah can bring it upon you if He so wills, and you shall not elude it. My advice will not benefit you—much as I desire to give you sound advice. If it is Allah’s will that you remain lost in grievous error, He is your Sustainer, and unto Him, you must return.” (11:32-33)

The statement “if it is God’s will that you remain lost in grievous error” conforms with the Quranic doctrine of “God’s way” regarding those who persistently refuse to acknowledge the truth. When God, knowing the persistence in sinning on the part of one who denies the truth, leaves him in this condition and does not compel him to repent, this act of God is described in the Quran as “causing one to err” and “causing one to go astray.” Similarly, when He, knowing that a person will repent, protects him and is kind to him, this act of God is described as “showing the right direction” or “offering guidance.”

MATERIALISM, FALSE PRIDE, AND ARROGANCE

Noah continued: “O my Sustainer! They have opposed me [throughout], for they follow people whose wealth and children have led them increasingly into ruin. They have devised a most awesome blasphemy [against Thee], as they said [to their followers]. ‘Do not ever abandon your gods, neither Wadd, Suwa, Yaghuth, Yauq nor Nasr!’ And so, they have led many astray. Hence, ordain Thou that these evildoers stray but farther [from all that they may desire]!” (71:21-24)

They follow people whose wealth and power only enhance their false pride and arrogance and lead them to spiritual ruin. This implies an exclusive devotion to material prosperity that must, in

the long run, destroy all moral values and, thus, society's fabric. The pre-Islamic Arabs worshipped the five gods (wadd, suwa, yaghuth, yauq, and nasr), among others. Their cult was probably introduced into Arabia from Syria and Babylonia, where it seems to have existed since antiquity.

NOAH PRAYED FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF EVIL ONES

Noah prayed: "O my Sustainer! Leave not on Earth any of those who deny the truth. If Thou do leave them, they will [always try to] lead astray those who worship Thee and will give birth to nothing but wickedness and stubborn ingratitude. O my Sustainer! Grant Thy forgiveness unto me, my parents, everyone who enters my house as a believer, and unto all believing men and women [of later times]. And grant Thou that evil doers shall increasingly meet with destruction!" (71:26-28) [After that], he prayed: "O my Sustainer! My people have given me the lie, therefore, lay Thou wide open the truth between them and me. Save me and those of the believers who are with me!" (26:117-118)

[Long] before those [who now deny resurrection] did Noah's people call it a lie. They gave the lie to Our servant and said, "Mad is he!" And he was repulsed. Thereupon, he called out to his Sustainer, "I am defeated; come Thou, then, to my succor!" (54:9-10)

No one is ever justified in assuming that the progeny of evildoers must be evil. The phrase "give birth to nothing but wickedness and stubborn ingratitude" denotes qualities or attitudes, not persons. "Lay Thou wide open the truth," or Thou decide with a clear decision between them and me.

BUILDING OF AN ARK

This was revealed unto Noah: "Never will any of your people believe except those who have already attained faith. Be not, then, distressed by anything they may do. Build, under Our eyes and Our inspiration, the ark [that shall save you and those who follow you]. And do not appeal to Me on behalf of those bent on evildoing, for they are destined to be drowned!" And [so Noah] set himself to build the ark, and every time the great ones of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him. [Thereupon], he said: "If you are scoffing at us, we are scoffing at you [and your ignorance], just as you are scoffing at us. But in time, you will know who it is [in this world] shall be visited by suffering, which will cover him with ignominy, and upon whom long-lasting suffering shall alight [in the life to come]!" (11:36-39)

The ark (lit., "ship") is rendered here as an "ark" due to its familiar connotation in European languages.

FLOOD OF EPIC PROPORTION

When Our judgment came to pass, and waters gushed forth in torrents over the face of the Earth, We said [to Noah]. "Place on board this [ark] one pair of each [kind of animal] of either sex and your family. Except those on whom [Our] sentence has already been passed and all [others] who have attained faith!" For only a few [of Noah's people] shared his faith. (11:40)

NOAH'S ATTEMPT TO SAVE HIS SON

So, he [Noah] said [to his followers]: "Embark on this [ship]! In the name of Allah, it shall sail and anchor! My Sustainer is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!" And it moved on with them into waves like mountains. At that [moment], Noah cried out to a son of his, who had kept himself aloof [from the others]: "O my dear son! Embark with us and remain not with those who deny the truth!" [But the son] answered: "I shall take myself to a

mountain that will protect me from the waters.” Said [Noah]: “Today there is no protection [for anyone] from Allah’s judgment, save [for] those who have earned [His] mercy!” And a wave rose between them, and [the son] was among those drowned. (11:41-43) Noah called out to his Sustainer and said: “O my Sustainer! My son was of my family, and Thy promises always come true, and Thou art the most just of all judges!” [Allah] answered: “O Noah, he was not of your family, for he was unrighteous in his conduct. And you shall not ask Me anything of which you cannot have any knowledge: thus, do I admonish you lest you become one of those who is unaware [of what is right]. Said [Noah], “O my Sustainer! I seek refuge with Thee from [ever again] asking of Thee anything of which I cannot have any knowledge! I shall be among the lost unless Thou grant me forgiveness and bestow Thy mercy upon me!” (11:45-47)

There is a gushing of water over the earth's surface, suggesting that the enormous valley has been inundated with water. Flooding, augmented by continuous, torrential rains, rapidly spread over the landmass. It grew into the immense deluge described in the Bible and the Quran. It is also referred to in the myths of ancient Greece (e.g., the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha) and Sumerian and Babylonian legends.

It is reasonable to assume that the animals Noah was commanded to take with him to the Ark were domesticated animals (and not all animals, as per the Biblical narrative).

Noah’s son and his wife preferred to remain with those who denied the truth. He drowned despite Noah’s pleas to board the ark. Noah endeavored to find out what would be the condition of his drowned son in the hereafter. He asked God to change His decrees in response to his desires. God admonished Noah because the ultimate destiny of any human being in the hereafter lies in the realm beyond human perception (al-ghayb). Noah understood the divine command “Place onboard this ark...your family” to mean all his

family, overlooking the qualifying clause, “except those on whom the sentence has already been passed.”

NOAH’S PRAYER TO REACH THE BLESSED DESTINATION

“As soon as you and those with you are settled in the ark, say: All praise is due to Allah, who has saved us from those evildoing folks!” And say: “O my Sustainer! Cause me to reach a destination blessed [by Thee]—for Thou art the best to show man how to reach his [true] destination!” In this [story] there are many messages [for those who think]: for We always put [man] to a test. (23:28-30)

With the above prayer enjoined upon Noah and, by implication, on every believer, the ark story is raised to symbolic significance. It is a parable of the human soul’s longing for divine illumination, which alone can show man how to save himself and reach his true destination in the realm of the spirit as well as in worldly life. The word “destination” implies a blessed condition of alighting or at a sacred place of alighting.

TORRENTIAL RAINS AND FLOATING OF NOAH’S ARK

We caused the gates of Heaven to open with water pouring down in torrents. We caused the Earth to burst forth with springs so that the waters met for a purpose pre-ordained. But for him, We bore Noah on that [vessel] made of [mere] planks and nails. It floated under Our eyes, a recompense for him who had been rejected with ingratitude. And, indeed, We have caused such [floating vessels] to remain forever a sign [of Our grace unto man]: who, then, is willing to take it to heart? And how severe is the suffering I inflict when My warnings are disregarded? (54:10-17) When the waters [of Noah’s flood] burst beyond all limits, it was We who caused you to be borne [to safety] in that floating ark, so that We might

make this a [lasting] reminder to you all, and that every wide-awake ear might consciously take it in. (69:11-12)

The reference to Noah's Ark, as made of mere planks and nails, stresses the frailty of this and any other human contrivance. The sign spoken of here alludes to God having endowed man's mind with inventiveness and, thus, with the ability to widen the scope of his life through conscious effort.

RESTING OF NOAH'S ARK ON MOUNT JUDI

The word was spoken: "O Earth, swallow up your waters! And, O sky, cease [your rain]!" And the waters sank into the Earth, and the will [of Allah] was done. The ark rested on Mount Judi. And the word was spoken: "Away with these evildoing folks!" (11:44)

[Thereupon] the word was spoken: "O Noah! Disembark in peace from Us, with [Our] blessings upon you, upon the people [who are with you, the righteous ones that will spring from you and] from those with you. But [as for the unrighteous] folk [that will spring from you]—We shall allow them to enjoy life [for a while], and then there will befall them grievous suffering from Us." (11:48)

Mount Judi, known in ancient Syriac as Qardu, is situated in the region of Lake Van. It is almost twenty-five miles northeast of the town of Jazirat Ibn' Umar, capital of the modern Syrian district of Al-Jazirah. It owes its fame to the Mesopotamian tradition, which identifies it (and not Mount Ararat) with the mountain on which Noah's Ark rested. The ark's resting place localization is based on the Babylonian tradition (Encyclopedia of Islam, 1059). However, the designation Ararat (the Assyrian Urartu) included the whole area to the south of Lake Van, where Jabal Judi is situated. This might explain the Biblical statement that "the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat" (Genesis 8:4).

The term salam, translated as "peace," encompasses both external and internal security from all evil. The phrase "the people or

generations from those with you” points to generations yet unborn. Since God’s blessing extends to all believers, it also includes the believers of Noah’s age. Since “those who deny the truth” (al-kafirun) are excluded from God’s blessing, only the righteous from among the offspring of these early believers are promised a share in His grace (see a similar allusion, relating to Abraham’s descendants, in 2:124). Hence, the interpolation of the words “as for the unrighteous that will spring from you” in the following sentence.

SAVING OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND PUNISHMENT FOR THE EVILDOERS

We saved him and all who stood by him in the ark and made them inherit [the Earth]. We caused those who gave the lie to Our messages to drown. What happened to those who were warned [in vain]? And after him, We sent forth [other] apostles—each to his people, and they brought them all evidence of the truth; but they would not believe in anything to which they had once given the lie. Thus, we seal the hearts of such as those who transgress the bounds of what is right. (10:73-74)

The above paragraph is an allusion to the fact that each of the apostles before Muhammad was sent to one particular people or community. The Prophet Muhammad was the first and the last to bring a universal message addressed to all humanity.

NOAH IS A SYMBOL OF GOD’S GRACE

Indeed, [in times long past] We sent forth Noah unto his people, and he lived among them a thousand-year bar fifty, and then the floods overwhelmed them while they were still lost in evildoing: but We saved him, together with all who were in the ark, which We then set up as a symbol [of Our grace] for all people [to remember]. (29:14-15)

The figure—950 years—is given in the Bible (4:29) as Noah’s life span. However, the number “950” may simply stand for an inordinate length of time, just as “seven” and “seventy” are often used in classical Arabic to denote “several” or “many.” The implication is that even after that inordinate length of time, Noah could not convince his people of the truth of his mission. Noah's reference is meant to reassure the believer. He may be distressed at seeing most of his fellowmen refuse to accept a truth that appears self-evident to him.

GOD’S PUNISHMENT

And [think of] the people of Noah: when they gave the lie to [one of] the apostles, We caused them to drown and made them a symbol for all humanity: for grievous suffering have We readied for all who [knowingly] do wrong! (25:37) Because of their sins, they were drowned [in the great flood], and doomed to suffer the fire [of the hereafter]. They found none who could succor them against Allah. (71:25) Indeed, [it was for this reason, that] Noah cried unto Us—and how excellent was Our response: for We saved him and his household from that awesome calamity, [the deluge] and caused his offspring to endure [on Earth]. We left him thus to be remembered among later generations: [Remembrance expressed in the salutation, which follows:] “Peace be upon Noah throughout all the worlds!” As We reward the doers of good—for he was truly one of our believing servants: [and so We saved him and those who followed him], and then We caused the others to drown. (37:75-82)

In this [story], there is a message [to men], even though most of them will not believe [in it]. But thy Sustainer—He alone—is almighty, a dispenser of grace. And so, We saved him and those [who were] with him in the fully laden ark, and then We caused those who stayed behind to drown. (26:119-122)

MUHAMMAD AND THE NOAH STORY

Do some, perchance, assert, “[Muhammad] has invented this [story]?” Say [O Prophet]: “If I have invented it, upon me be this sin; however, far be it from me to commit the sin of which you are guilty.” (11:35) These accounts of something beyond your perception, We [now] reveal unto you, [O Muhammad: for] neither you nor your people knew them [fully] before this. Be, then, [like Noah], patient in adversity—for the future belongs to the God-conscious! (11:49)

The verses above are a parenthetical passage addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, relating to Noah's story as narrated in the Quran. Although the Arabs, even before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, had vaguely known the story of Noah, they and the Prophet were unaware of the details as narrated in the preceding Quranic account.

WIVES OF NOAH AND LOT BETRAYED THEIR HUSBANDS

For those bent on denying the truth, Allah has propounded a parable in [the stories of] Noah's wife and Lot's wife. They were wedded to two of Our righteous servants, and each betrayed her husband; and neither of the two [husbands] will be of any avail to these two women when they are told [on Judgment Day], “Enter the fire with all those [other sinners] who enter it!” (66:10)

The story of Lot's wife and her spiritual betrayal of her husband is mentioned in the Quran in several places. The above is the only explicit reference to Noah's wife, who betrayed her husband. The parable of these two women implies, firstly, that even the most intimate relationship with a truly righteous person—even though he is a prophet—cannot save an unrepentant sinner from the consequences of his sin. Secondly, a true believer must cut himself off from any association with those bent on denying the truth, even if they happen to be the nearest and dearest to him.

NOAH'S FLOOD WAS LOCAL OR WORLDWIDE?

The Quranic version of Noah's flood does not support a world deluge. Only those who rejected Noah were drowned—hence, the deluge affected only the territory of Noah's people, not the whole world. The deluge spoken of in the Bible, in the myths of Samaria and Babylonia, and in the Quran probably represents the inundation during the Ice Age of the huge basin today covered by the Mediterranean. The inundation may have been due to the Atlantic breaking through the land barrier at Gibraltar, and/or the Black Sea through what is now the Dardanelles.

THE SEVEN NOAHIDE LAWS

The seven Noahide laws come close to the Quran's fundamental moral law. God communicated the Noahide Laws to Adam and Noah, the ancestors of all human beings. That makes these rules universal for all times, places, and people. Without these rules, humanity would not exist in harmony. The following is a slightly modified version of the Noahide laws:

1. Do not profane God's Oneness in any way: Acknowledge that there is a single God who cares about what we are doing and desires that we take care of His world.
2. Do not curse your Creator: No matter how angry you may be, do not verbally attack your Creator.
3. Do not murder: Human life is sacred. To destroy a single human life is to destroy the entire world—because, for that person, the world has disappeared.
4. Never steal, use short measures, or take bribes or kickbacks. Whatever benefits you receive in this world, make sure that none of them are taken at the expense of someone else.
5. Be kind toward all God's creatures. Do not harm animals. Give charity (Added to Noahide laws)

6. Keep your base desires in check: Incest, adultery, rape, and homosexual relations are forbidden. These sinful acts destroy the family unit, the foundation of human society. Sexuality is sacred, being the fountain of life. When abused, nothing is more humiliating and destructive to human beings.
7. Establish the rule of law: With every small act of justice, we restore harmony to our world, synchronizing it with a supernatural order. Therefore, laws are essential for the society's stability and peace.

Chapter 5

ABRAHAM (IBRAHIM IN ARABIC)

The native place and the scene of Abraham's early struggles against polytheism were Ur in Mesopotamia, Iraq.

SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

We gave Abraham [his first] insight into [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth—and [this] to the end that he might become one of those who are inwardly sure. Then, when the night overshadowed him with its darkness, he beheld a star; [and] he exclaimed, "This is my Sustainer!"—But when it set, he exclaimed, "I love not the things that go down." Then, when he beheld the moon rising, he said, "This is my Sustainer!"—But when it went down, he cried, "Indeed, if my Sustainer guides me not, I will certainly become one of the people who go astray!" Then, when he beheld the sun rising, he said, "This is my Sustainer! This one is the greatest ever!" But when it went down, he exclaimed: "O my people! Far be it from me to ascribe divinity, as you do, to anything besides Allah! "Unto Him who brought into being the heavens and the earth, I have turned my face away from all that is false. I am not of those who ascribe divinity to anything beside Him." (6:75-79)

The verses above describe Abraham's gradual grasp of the truth. This is symbolized by his intuitive progress from adoration of celestial bodies—stars, the moon, and the sun—to a full realization of God's transcendental, all-embracing existence.

THE PARABLE OF TRAINED BIRDS

Abraham said: "O my Sustainer! Show me how Thou give life to the dead!" Said He [God], "Do you, then, have no faith?" [Abraham] answered: "Yea, but [let me see it] so that my heart

may be fully at rest.” Said He: “Take four birds and teach them to obey you; place them separately on every hill [around you]; then summon them: they will come flying to you. And know that Allah is almighty, wise.” (2:260)

The parable of trained birds represents Abraham’s spiritual development and attempt to understand God’s resurrection power. The moral of this story is “If a man can train birds in such a way that they obey his call, then it is evident that God, whose will all things obey, can call life into being by simply decreeing, ‘Be!’”

DIALOGUE WITH THE KING

Are you not aware of that [king] who argued with Abraham about his Sustainer, [simply] because Allah had granted him kingship? Lo! Abraham said: “My Sustainer, He grants life and deals death.” [The king] replied: “I [too] grant life and deal death!” Said Abraham, “Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west!” Thereupon, he who was bent on denying the truth remained dumbfounded: for Allah does not guide people who [deliberately] do wrong. (2:258)

Nimrod was probably the king with whom Abraham had the above dialogue.

DIALOGUES WITH HIS FATHER

Abraham’s father’s occupation was carpentry and the making and selling of statues for worship. In the Bible, Abraham’s father is Terah and Azar in the Quran. He seems to have been known by other names (or designations). Thus, in various Talmudic stories, he is called Zarah. At the same time, Eusebius Pamphili (the ecclesiastical historian who lived toward the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century of the Christian era) calls him Athar. The designation Azar (which occurs only once in the Quran in 6:74) is perhaps the pre-Islamic, Arabicized form of Athar or Zarah. The

Quran mentions various instances, as described below, where Abraham and his father argued regarding polytheism.

BLIND IMITATION OF FOREFATHERS

And, lo, Abraham said unto his father Azar: "You take idols for gods? I see you and your people have gone astray!" (6:74) Indeed, long before [the time of Moses], We vouchsafed unto Abraham his consciousness of what is right, and We were aware of [what moved] him when he said unto his father and his people, "What are these images to which you are so intensely devoted?" They answered: "We found our forefathers worshipping them. (21:51-53) We worship idols, and we remain ever devoted to them." Said he: "Do [you think] they hear you when you invoke them, or benefit you or harm you?" They exclaimed: "But we found our forefathers doing the same!" (26:71-74)

The expression "long before (the time of Moses)" stresses continuity in man's religious insight and experience. The meaning of "consciousness of what is right" emphasizes Abraham's highly personal, intellectual realization of God's almightiness and uniqueness. As a result, his people evaded a direct response to Abraham's criticism that idol worship does not help, benefit, or harm his people. "Our forefathers did the same" merely stresses its antiquity, and its precedence over time is no proof of a concept's soundness.

IDOL WORSHIP EQUALS SATANIC WORSHIP

Call to mind, through this divine writ, Abraham. He was a man of truth, a prophet when he spoke to his father: "Why do you worship something that neither hears nor sees and can be of no avail to you? There has indeed come to me [a ray of knowledge] that has not yet come to you. Follow me, then; I shall guide you onto a perfect way. O my father! Do not worship Satan—for Satan rebels against the Most Gracious! I dread lest a chastisement from

the Most Gracious befall you, and then you will become [aware of having been] close unto Satan!” (19:41-45)

He (Abraham’s father) answered: “Do you dislike my gods, O Abraham? Indeed, if you cease not, I shall most certainly cause you to be stoned to death! Now be gone from me for good!” (19:46)

The ray of “knowledge” refers to the cognition of God’s existence and uniqueness through intellectual insight. The absurdity inherent in the attribution of divine qualities to anything but God is here declared, by implication, equivalent to “worshipping” the epitome of unreason and ingratitude symbolized in Satan’s rebellion against his Creator. Hence, the Quran describes every impulse that inherently offends against truth, reason, and morality as “satanic” and every conscious act of submission to such demonic influences as “worship of Satan.” The most terrible consequence of deliberate sinning is one’s belated realization, in the hereafter, of having been “close unto Satan.”

ABRAHAM’S PRAYER FOR HIS FATHER’S SALVATION

[Abraham] replied: “Peace be upon you! I shall ask my Sustainer to forgive you: for He has always been kind unto me. But I shall withdraw from you all and from whatever you invoke instead of Allah and shall invoke my Sustainer [alone]. It may well be that my prayer [for you] will not remain unanswered by my Sustainer.” (19:47-48) “O my Sustainer! Endow me with the ability to judge [between right and wrong], and make me one with the righteous, and grant me the power to convey the truth unto those who will come after me and place me among those who shall inherit the garden of bliss! And forgive my father—for he is among those who have gone astray. Do not put me to shame on the Day when all shall be raised from the dead. The Day on which neither wealth will be of any use nor children, [and when] only he [will be

blessed] who comes before Allah with a heart free of evil!" (26:83-89)

FINALLY, DISAVOWING HIS FATHER

Abraham's prayer that his father be forgiven was due to a promise he had given the latter [in his lifetime]; but when it was made clear that he had been Allah's enemy, [Abraham] disavowed him - [although], behold, Abraham was most tender-hearted, most clement. (9:114)

DIALOGUES WITH HIS PEOPLE

And behold, of his persuasion was Abraham, too, when he turned to his Sustainer with a heart free of evil. And [thus] spoke to his father and his people: "What is it that you worship? Do you want [to bow down before] a lie - [before] deities other than Allah? What, then, do you think of the Sustainer of all the worlds?" Then he glanced at the stars and said, "Verily, I am sick [at heart]!" (37:83-89)

Abraham's argument is thus: "Do you believe in the existence of a Creator and Lord of the universe?" - a question which his people were bound to answer in the affirmative since belief in a Supreme Deity was an integral part of their religion. The next stage of the argument would be: "How, then, can you worship idols - the work of your own hands - side-by-side with the idea of a Creator of the universe?" "**Then he cast a glance at the stars,**" an allusion to his early, futile attempts at identifying God with the stars, the sun or the moon (see 6: 76-78).]

LOVE OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

[Abraham] said: "You have chosen to worship idols instead of Allah for no other reason than to have a bond of love in this world, between yourselves [and your forebears]. But then, on

Resurrection Day, you shall disown one another and curse one another—for the goal of you all will be fire, and you will have none to succor you.” (29:25)

Your habit of idol worship is a result of blind imitation (taqlid) inherited from past generations. The above verse represents one of the strongest Quranic condemnations of the unquestioning adoption of religious practices based on blind faith in the authority of tradition, a spiritual leader, or love of this material world.

YOUR LIFELESS IDOLS

His people argued with him. He said: “Do you argue with me about Allah when He guided me? But I do not fear anything to which you ascribe divinity side by side with Him, [for no evil can befall me] unless my Sustainer so wills. All things my Sustainer encompass is within His knowledge; will you not, then, keep this in mind? And why should I fear anything that you worship side by side with Him, realizing that you are not afraid of ascribing divinity to other powers besides Allah without His ever bestowing upon you from on high any warrant therefor?” (6:80-81)

SECURE ON THE TRUE PATH

“[Tell me], then, which of the two parties has a better right to feel secure—if you happen to know [the answer]? Those who have attained to faith, and who have not obscured their faith by wrongdoing—it is they who shall be secure since it is they who have found the right path!” And this was Our argument which We vouchsafed to Abraham against his people: [for] We raise by degrees whom We will. Thy Sustainer is wise, all-knowing. (6:81-83)

As God’s argument implies, Abraham’s reasoning was divinely inspired and valid for followers of the Quran. The expression “by degrees” may mean many degrees, signifying the tremendous

spiritual dignity to which this forerunner of a long line of prophets was ultimately raised.

DECLARATION OF ENMITY

Indeed, you had an excellent example in Abraham and those who followed him when they said unto the [idolatrous] people: “We are quit of you and of all that you worship instead of Allah. We deny the truth of whatever you believe. Between you and us, there has arisen enmity and hatred, lasting until you believe in One God!” The only exception was Abraham’s saying to his father, “I shall pray for [God’s] forgiveness for you, although I have it not in my power to obtain anything from Allah on your behalf.” (60:4)

Finally, Abraham broke off from his community. Filial love prevented Abraham from including his father in declaring “enmity and hatred.” However, after his father died as an idolater, Abraham could not but disavow him.

ABRAHAM BREAKING IDOLS

Said he [Abraham], “Indeed, you and your forefathers have gone astray!” They asked: “Have you come unto us [with this claim] in all earnest—or are you one of those jesters?” He answered: “No, but your [true] Sustainer is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth—He who has brought them into being, and I am one of those who bear witness to this [truth]!” And [he added to himself] “By Allah, I shall most certainly bring about the downfall of your idols as soon as you have turned your backs and gone away!” (21:54-57) Thereupon, he approached their gods stealthily and said, “What! You do not eat [of the offerings placed before you]? What is amiss with you that you do not speak?” And then he fell upon them, smiting them with his right hand. (39:91-93) And then he broke those [idols] to pieces, [all] save the biggest of them so that they could turn to it. [When they realized what had happened], they said: “Who has done this to our gods? One of the

worst wrongdoers is he!” Said some [of them]: “We heard a youth speak of these [gods with scorn]: he is called Abraham.” [The others] said: “Then bring him before the people’s eyes, so that they might bear witness [against him]!” [And when he came], they asked: “Have you done this to our gods, O Abraham?” He answered: “No, it was this one, the biggest of them, that did it: but ask them [yourselves]—provided, it can speak!” (21:58-63) “Do you worship something that you [yourselves] have carved, the while it is Allah who has created you and all your handiwork?” (37:95-96)

Abraham’s argument goes thus: “Do you believe in the existence of a Creator and Lord of the universe?” His people were bound to answer in the affirmative since belief in a Supreme Deity was an integral part of their religion. The next stage of the argument would be: “How, then, can you worship idols - the work of your own hands - side-by-side with the idea of a Creator of the universe?”

WILL YOU USE YOUR REASON?

And so, they turned upon one another, saying, “It is you who are doing wrong.” But then they relapsed into their former way of thinking and said: “You know very well that these [idols] cannot speak!” Said [Abraham]: “Do you worship, instead of Allah, something that cannot benefit you in any way, nor harm you? Fie upon you and upon all that you worship instead of Allah! Will you not, then, use your reason?” (21:64-67)

First, they argued for rashly suspecting Abraham, and then a sudden reversal of their readiness to exonerate Abraham and return to their former suspicion. By breaking the idols, Abraham made a point: Why do you worship something that neither hears nor sees and can be of no avail whatsoever to you?

CAST ABRAHAM INTO FIRE

They exclaimed: “Build a pyre for him and cast him into the blazing fire!” (37:97) “Burn him, and [thereby] succor your gods, if you are going to do [anything]!” [But] We said: “O fire! Be thou cool, and [a source of] inner peace for Abraham!” (21:68-69) Allah saved him from the fire. Behold, in this [story] there are messages indeed for people who will believe!

(29:24) But whereas they sought to do evil unto him, We [frustrated their designs, and thus] brought them low. (37:98) Thereupon [his brother’s son] Lot came to believe in him and said: “Verily, I [too] shall forsake the domain of evil [and turn] to my Sustainer: for, verily, He alone is almighty, truly wise!” (29:26)

TO THE HOLY LAND

And [Abraham] said: “Verily, I shall [leave this land and] go wherever my Sustainer will guide me!” (37:99) We caused them to suffer the most significant loss. We saved him and Lot, [his brother’s son, by guiding them] to the land which We have blessed for all times to come.” (21:70-71)

“The greatest loss” refers to Abraham forsaking his homeland and abandoning his people to their spiritual ignorance. The blessed land refers to Palestine, which became the homeland of a long line of prophets. Nowhere does the Quran state that Abraham was physically thrown into the fire and miraculously kept alive in it (a popular myth among Muslims). On the contrary, the phrase “God saved him from the fire” points instead to him not being thrown into it. The Quran gives us an allegorical allusion to the fire of persecution that Abraham had to suffer, and which, by dint of its intensity, became a source of spiritual strength and inner peace (salaam).

FOLLOW ABRAHAM'S CREED

Abraham was a man who combined all virtues within himself. He devoutly obeyed Allah's will, turning away from all that is false, and not being among those who ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah. [He was always] grateful for the blessings granted by Him, who elected him and guided him onto a straightway. And so, We vouchsafed him good in this world, and in the life to come [too] he shall find himself among the righteous. (16:120-122)

Hanif (“turning away from all that is false”) was applied to those inclined to a right state or tendency. Pre-Islamic, this term had monotheistic connotations. It was used to describe a man who turned away from the worldliness of sin and dubious beliefs, especially idol worship.

Unitarian God-seekers in pre-Islamic times mostly dedicated themselves to long vigils and prayers.

ABRAHAM AND HIS FOLLOWERS' PRAYER

[And Abraham and his followers prayed]: “O our Sustainer! We placed our trust in thee, and turn unto Thee for with Thee is all journeys' end. O our Sustainer! Make us not a plaything for those bent on denying the truth! And forgive us our sins, O our Sustainer: for Thou alone are almighty, truly wise!” (60:5)

WHY DO I WORSHIP ONE GOD?

Said [Abraham]: “Have you ever considered what it is you have been worshiping—you and those ancient forebears of yours? Now [as for me, I know that] these [false deities] are my enemies, [and that none is my helper], save the Sustainer of all the worlds. Who has created me and is the one who guides me and is the one who gives me to eat and to drink, and when I fall ill, is the one who restores me to health, and who will cause me to die and will bring me back to life—and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on

Judgment Day!” (26:75-82) And when Abraham spoke to his father and his people, [he had this truth in mind]: “Far be it from me to worship what you worship! None [do I worship] but Him who brought me into being, and it is He who will guide me!” He uttered this as a word destined to endure among those who would come after him so that they might [always] return [to it]. Now [as for those who came after him], I allowed them, as [I had allowed] their forebears—to enjoy their lives freely until the truth should come unto them through an apostle who would make all things clear. (43:26-29)

Among the above verses, it is evident that one cannot blindly accept a person's adherence to religious views dictated by an ancestral tradition or prevailing culture. Blind faith may conflict with reason and divine revelation. However, God did not impose any moral obligations on them (“I allowed them”) before making the meaning of right and wrong clear to them through a revealed message. It is an allusion to the prophet's pagan contemporaries and the prosperity they enjoyed for a long time (cf. 21:44). This passage implies God would never call people to task for any wrong they may have done. This is so long as they have not been clearly shown how to discriminate between good and evil (cf. 6:131-132).

WORSHIP GOD, YOUR SUSTAINER

Abraham, [too, was inspired by Us] when he said to his people: “Worship Allah and be conscious of Him: this is the best for you if you but knew it! You worship only [lifeless] idols instead of Allah, and [thus] you give visible shape to a lie! Those [things and beings] that you worship instead of Allah have it not in their power to provide sustenance for you: seek, then, all [your] sustenance from Allah, and worship Him [alone] and be grateful to Him: [for] unto Him, you shall be brought back! And if you give [me] the lie—well, [other] communities have given the lie [to God’s prophets] before your time: however, no more is an apostle bound

*to do than to deliver the message [entrusted to him] clearly.”
(29:16-18)*

EXCELLENT EXAMPLE IN ABRAHAM

In them, indeed, you have an excellent example for everyone who looks forward to [with hope and awe] to Allah and the Last Day. And if any turns away, [let him know that] Allah is truly self-sufficient, the one to whom all praise is due. (60:6) And lastly, [We have inspired you, [O Muhammad, with this message]: “Follow the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false and was not of those who ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah.” (16:123)

PROPHETS FROM THE HOUSE OF ABRAHAM

We bestowed upon him [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob, and We guided each of them as

We guided Noah aforetime. And out of his offspring, [We bestowed prophethood upon] David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron. For thus, We reward the doers of good. And [upon] Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah. Every one of them was of righteous, and [upon] Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot and every one of them We favored above other people. [We exalted] some of their forefathers, their offspring, and their brethren. We elected them [all] and guided them on a straightway. Such is Allah's guidance: He guides whomever He wills. We vouchsafed revelation, sound judgment, and prophethood to them. (6:84-89)

We have inspired you [O Prophet] just as We inspired Noah and all the prophets after him. As We inspired Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants, including Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon. In addition, We vouchsafed to David a book of divine wisdom. [Psalms] And [We inspired other] apostles whom We have mentioned to you before, as well as

apostles whom We have not mentioned to you. As Allah spoke His word unto Moses. [We sent all these] apostles as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, so that men might have no excuse before Allah after [the coming of] these apostles: and Allah is indeed almighty, wise. (4:163-165) And lo! We accepted a solemn pledge from all the prophets and you, [O Muhammad], as well as from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, the son of Mary. We accepted a most weighty, solemn pledge from [all] them, so that [at the end of time] He might ask those men of truth as to [what response], their truthfulness [received on Earth]. And grievous suffering He has readied for all who deny the truth! (33:7-8)

“Solemn pledge” relates to every Prophet's pledge—i.e., sacred duty—to convey God's message to man and thus to act as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. Only a few of the earlier prophets have been specifically mentioned along with their histories in the Quran (always in connection with a particular moral lesson), while most of the earlier prophets are referred to in only a general manner in support of the divine statement that no community or civilization is left without prophetic guidance.

OMISSION OF ABRAHAM'S TRAVEL TO EGYPT IN THE QURAN

The Quran does not mention Abraham's travel to the holy land and then to Egypt. One can only speculate about this conspicuous omission. It may be one of the most horrendous stories of cruelty and injustice. Abraham acquired a slave girl called Hagar in Egypt and returned to the holy land. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was barren, and she gave Hagar to Abraham as his second wife. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, Abraham's first-born son. The conflict between Sarah and Hagar and Ishmael and Isaac led to Hagar and Ishmael's eviction. Please read the rest of Abraham's family story in volume three. It gives the background to the conflict between Jews and Palestinians.

Chapter 6

ISAAC AND JACOB

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF JUDAISM

Jewish people believe God is the single Creator and Animator of the world. He has no helpers, no children, and no rivals. God is the invisible force behind everything that happens and knows everything: past, present, and future. Judaism is the oldest pure monotheistic faith. The **first covenant** was between God and Abraham. God asks Abraham to do certain things, in return for which he will take special care of them. Jewish and Muslim men are circumcised as a symbol of this covenant. The Torah refers to Abraham as Hebrew, and the name is associated with the language of his descendants. His grandson, Jacob, was given the name Israel, and that name has become closely associated with the Israelite homeland.

After 210 years of slavery in Egypt, God took His people to the Mountain, where he made a second covenant with them. Moses led the Jews out of Egypt and to whom God communicated in the presence of the people. He recorded the story of creation and the history of Abraham's family up until his time in what became known as the Torah, or the **Five Books of Moses**. In addition, the Torah also contains God's instructions for personal and communal life.

In exchange for all God has done, Jewish people were required to keep God's laws. They were also required to strive for holiness in every aspect of their lives. The most significant religious document is the Torah. It contains 613 instructions, called mitzvahs. While some of these mitzvahs pertain to the Holy Temple, others are applicable to daily Jewish life.

Oral Torah: Alongside the Divine traditions Moses recorded in the Torah, God communicated many details and commandments orally. As time went on, the sages of each generation discussed the Torah and elaborated on its principles. Eventually, these discussions were written down, becoming the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash. Rabbis are learned Jews who are proficient in key areas of the Torah.

And after he [Abraham] withdrawn from them [his homeland, Iraq] and from all, they worshipped instead of Allah. We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob and made each of them a prophet. We bestowed upon them [manifold] gifts out of Our grace and granted them a lofty power to convey the truth [to others]. (19:49-50) [As for Abraham], We bestowed Isaac and [Isaac's son] Jacob upon him and caused prophethood and revelation to continue among his offspring. And We vouchsafed him his reward in this world, and in the life to come [too] he shall find himself among the righteous. (29:27)

ANGELS BRINGING GOOD NEWS OF ISAAC'S BIRTH

And has the story of Abraham's honored guests ever come within thy ken? When those [heavenly messengers] came unto him and bade him peace, he answered, "[And upon you be) peace!" - [saying to himself], "They are strangers." Then he turned quietly to his household, and brought forth a fat [roasted] calf, and placed it before them, saying, "Will you not eat?" And when he saw that the guests would not eat, he became apprehensive of them; [but] they said, "Fear not" - and gave him the glad tiding of [the birth of] a son who would be endowed with deep knowledge. (51:24-28) And indeed, there came unto Abraham, Our [heavenly] messengers, bearing a glad tiding. They bade him peace; [and] he answered, "[And upon you be] peace!" And he made haste to place a roasted calf before them. But when he saw that their hands did not reach out towards it, he deemed their conduct strange and

became apprehensive of them. [But] they said: "Fear not! Behold, we are sent to Lot's people." His wife, standing nearby, laughed [with happiness]. Thereupon, We gave her the glad tiding of [the birth of] Isaac and, after Isaac, of [his son] Jacob. Said she: "Oh, woe is me! Shall I bear a child now that I am an old woman, and this husband is an older man? Verily, that would be a strange thing indeed!" Answered [the messengers]: "Dost thou deem it strange that Allah should decree what He wills? The grace of Allah and His blessings be upon you, O people of this house! Verily, ever to be praised, sublime is He!" (11:69-73)

The term "Our messengers" or angels is often used to mean heavenly messengers. They did not eat since they were angels. In the Arabian tradition of hospitality, a stranger's refusal to partake of food offered indicates unfriendly intent. Abraham, who had not realized his guests were angels until then, became apprehensive of possible hostility on their part. Sarah realized the strangers were God's messengers and that she and Abraham had nothing to fear from them—hence the interpolation of the words "with happiness."

SARAH AND ABRAHAM'S SKEPTICISM

Thereupon, his wife approached [the guests] with a loud cry and struck her face [in astonishment] and exclaimed: "A barren old woman [like me]!" They answered: "Thus has thy Sustainer decreed; and, verily, He alone is truly wise, all-knowing!" Said [Abraham]: "And what [else] may you have in view, O you [heavenly] messengers?" They answered: "Behold, we have been sent unto a people lost in sin, (Lot's people) to let loose stone-hard blows of chastisement, marked out in thy Sustainer's sight for [the punishment of] such as have wasted their selves." (51:29-34) Said he: "Do you give me this glad tiding even though old age has overtaken me? Of what [strange thing], then, are you giving me a tiding!" They answered: "We have given thee the glad tiding of something bound to come true: so be not of those who abandon

hope! [Abraham] exclaimed: “And who — other than those who have utterly lost their way — could ever abandon the hope of his Sustainer’s grace?”(15:54-56)

The angels replied that we had given you the glad tidings of God's truth. Do you find God’s decree strange? The real meaning of this rhetorical question can only be brought out by paraphrasing it in the manner attempted above: Namely, as an echo of the statement repeated several times in the Quran: “When God wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, ‘Be’—and it is.” The stress on God’s grace arises from Abraham’s saying in the verse above: “And who—other than those who have utterly lost their way—could ever lose the hope of his Sustainer’s grace?”

And We bestowed upon him Isaac and [Isaac’s son] Jacob as an additional gift and caused all of them to be righteous men. We made them leaders who would guide [others] in accordance with Our behest. For We inspired them [with a will] to do good works, and to be constant in prayer, and to dispense charity, and Us [alone] did they worship. (21:72-73) And call to mind Our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, [all of them] endowed with inner strength and vision: for, verily, We purified them by means of thought the purest: the remembrance of the life to come. And behold, in Our sight, they were indeed among the elect, the truly good! (38:45-47)

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE EVILDOERS AMONG ISRAELITES

Thus, We reward the doers of good - for he was truly one of our believing servants. And [in time] We gave him the glad tiding of Isaac, [who, too, would be] a prophet, one of the righteous. We blessed him and Isaac. Among the offspring of these two were [destined] to

be both doers of good and would glaringly sin against themselves. (37:110-113)

God's blessing on a Prophet, or a saint, does not, by itself, imply special status on his descendants, especially the evildoers.

JACOB'S ADMONITION TO HIS SONS

This very thing Abraham bequeathed to his children, and [so did] Jacob: "O my children! Allah has granted you the purest faith. Do not allow death to overtake you before you have surrendered yourselves unto Him." You [yourselves, O children of Israel], bear witness. When death approached Jacob, he said to his sons: "Whom will you worship after I am gone?" They answered: "We will worship thy God, the God of thy forefathers Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, the One God; and unto Him will we surrender ourselves." (2:132-133)

In classical Arabic, as in ancient Hebrew usage, the term ab ("father") was applied to the direct male parent and grandfathers and even more distant ancestors and paternal uncles. This explains why Ishmael, Jacob's uncle, is mentioned in this context. Since he was the firstborn of Abraham's sons, his name precedes Isaac.

THE BIBLICAL VERSION OF BIRTH OF ISAAC

God also told Abraham, "As for Sarah, I will bless her and surely give you a son from her." And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael lived under your blessing!" Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. (Genesis 17:15-19)

There is no mention in the Quran of God establishing a covenant with Isaac and his descendants. This covenant is supposedly the basis of "chosen people," a false notion of Jewish superiority.

Chapter 7

LOT (LUT IN ARABIC)

Lot was a stranger in Sodom, having come there from Mesopotamia, commissioned by God to offer guidance to the sinful community of Sodom before God's judgment came to pass. Lot, a son of Abraham's brother, lived near the Dead Sea (called in Arabic Bahr Lut, "Lot's Sea"). Throughout the Quran, the expression "Lot's people" designates the inhabitants of the town (or country) of Sodom, among whom he chose to live and to whom he was entrusted with a prophetic mission.

MIGRATION OF LOT WITH ABRAHAM

Thereupon [his brother's son] Lot came to believe in him (Abraham) and said: "I [also] shall forsake the domain of evil [and turn] to my Sustainer: for He alone is almighty, truly wise!" (29:26)

The term Hijrah (forsake evil's domain) is used in physical and spiritual senses. It is analogous to the earlier allusion (in 19:48-49) to Abraham's "withdrawal" from his evil, native environment, and to his physical migration to Harran (in northern Mesopotamia), and eventually to Syria and Palestine.

ANGELS BRINGING GOOD AND BAD NEWS TO ABRAHAM

And so, when Our [heavenly] messengers came to Abraham with the glad tidings [of the birth of Isaac], they [also] said, "Behold, we are about to destroy the people of that land, [Sodom and Gomorrah], for its people are truly evildoers!" [And when Abraham] exclaimed, "But Lot lives there!" - they answered: "We know fully well who is there; most certainly we shall save him and his household - all but his wife: she will indeed be among those

that stay behind.” (29:31-32) Said [Abraham]: “And what [else] may you have in view, O you [heavenly] messengers?” They answered: “We have been sent unto people lost in sin [Lot’s people], to let loose stone-hard blows [lit., “stones of clay” signifying pre-ordained chastisement], marked out in thy Sustainer’s sight for [the punishment of] such as have wasted their own selves.” (51:31-34)

He pleaded with Us for Lot’s people. Abraham was most clement, most tender-hearted, intent upon turning to Allah again and again. [But Allah’s messengers replied]: “O Abraham! Desist from this [pleading]! Thy Sustainer’s judgment has already gone forth: and there shall fall upon them a chastisement which none can avert!” (11:74-76)

He pleaded [lit., “argued”] with “Our messengers,” who had announced to him the impending doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, and not with God Himself.

LOT’S PREACHING

[AND] the people of Lot gave the lie to [one of Allah’s] message-bearers when their brother Lot said unto them: “Will you not be conscious of Allah? Behold, I am an apostle [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust. Be, then, conscious of Allah, and pay heed to me! And no reward whatever I ask of you for it: my reward rests with none but the Sustainer of all the worlds. Must you, of all people, [lustfully] approach men, keeping yourselves aloof from all the [lawful] spouses your Sustainer has created for you? Nay, but you are people who transgress all bounds of what is right!” (26:160-166) AND [thus, too, did We save] Lot, when he said unto his people: “Would you commit this abomination with your eyes open [to its being against all nature]? Must you approach men with lust instead of women? Nay, but you are people without any awareness [of right and wrong]!” (27:54-55) [Remember] Lot, when he said unto his people: “Will you

commit abominations like none in all the world has ever done before you? You approach men instead of women with lust: no, but you are people given to excesses! (7:80-81) AND LOT, [too, was inspired by Us] when he said unto his people: “Verily, you commit abominations like none in all the world has ever committed before you! Must you indeed approach men [with lust] and thus cut across the way [of nature]? And must you commit these shameful deeds in your [open] assemblies?” (29:28-29)

HIS PEOPLE’S RESPONSE

But his people’s only answer was this: “Expel them from your land! They are who make themselves pure!” (7:82) “Bring down upon us Allah’s chastisement if you are a man of truth!” [And] he prayed: “O my Sustainer! Succor Thou me against these people who spread corruption!” (29:29) Said they, “Indeed, if you desist not, O Lot, you will certainly be expelled [from this township]!” [Lot] exclaimed: “I am one of those who utterly abhor your doings!” [And then he prayed]: “O my Sustainer! Save me and my household from all that they are doing!” (26:167-169)

“Make themselves out to be pure” is used here ironically.

ANGELS ENTERING THE LOT HOUSE

And when Our messengers came unto Lot, he was sorely grieved on their account, noting that it was beyond his power to shield them; but they said: “Fear not, and grieve not! Behold, we shall save thee and thy household - all but thy wife: she will indeed be among those left behind. Verily, we shall bring down upon the people of this land a horror from heaven in requital of all their iniquitous doings!” And [so it happened; and] thereof, indeed, We have left a clear sign for people who use their reason. (29:33-35) And when the messengers [of God] came to Lot’s house, he said: “Behold, you are people unknown [here]!” They answered: “Nay,

but we have come unto thee with [the announcement of] something that they [who are given to evil] have always been wont to call in question. We are bringing thee the certainty [of its fulfillment]: for, behold, we are speaking the truth indeed.” (15:61-64)

Since Lot presumed the strangers were handsome young men, he felt sure his sinful countrymen would sexually molest them. Lot was grieved by his utter inability to afford his guests protection from the people of Sodom, whose homosexual propensities have ever since been commemorated in the term “sodomy.” “Call into question” the doom, which in this world or the hereafter is the inevitable consequence of deliberate sinning: a prediction that the sinners themselves so often deride (11:8).

CITY REJOICING AT THE ARRIVAL OF HANDSOME STRANGERS

And the city people came [to Lot] rejoicing at the glad tidings. Exclaimed [Lot]: “Behold, these are my guests. So, put me not to shame, but be conscious of Allah and disgrace me not!” They answered: “Have we not forbidden thee [to offer protection] to any kind of people?” (15:67-70) And when Our messengers came unto Lot, he was sorely grieved on their account, recognizing that it was beyond his power to shield them; and he exclaimed: “This is a woeful day!” And his people came running to him, compelled towards his house [by their desire]: for they had ever been wont to commit [such] abominations. (11:77-78)

TAKE MY DAUGHTERS

Said [Lot]: “O my people! [Take instead] these daughters of mine: they are purer for you [than men]! Be then conscious of Allah and disgrace me not by [assaulting] my guests. Is there not among you even one right-minded man?” They answered: “Thou hast always known we have no use whatsoever for their daughters; and, verily,

well dost thou know what we want!” Exclaimed [Lot]: “Would I have the strength to defeat you, or that I could lean upon some mightier support!” (11:78-80) [But the angels spoke thus]: “As thou livest, [O Lot, they will not listen to thee]: behold, in their delirium [of lust] they are but blindly stumbling to and fro!” (15:72)

The phrase “these daughters of mine” probably signifies here “the daughters of my community” (since a prophet is the spiritual father of his people). The broader implication points to the natural relationship between man and woman, juxtaposed with the perverse desires of Sodom. “I could lean upon some mightier support,” we have several authentic traditions that Lot meant was God’s support. For the Prophet Muhammad, referring to this Quranic passage, said, “God bestowed His grace upon Lot, for he betook himself indeed to mighty support!”

SEVERING TIES WITH THE SINFUL CITY

[The angels] said: “O Lot! We are messengers from thy Sustainer! Never shall [your enemies] reach you! Depart, then, with your household while it is yet night, and let none of you look back. [And take with you all your family], except your wife. For whatever befalls these [people of Sodom] shall befall her [as well]. Their appointed time is the morning—[and] is not the morning nigh?” (11:81) Go, then with thy household while it is yet night, with thyself following them in the rear, and let none of you look back, but proceed whither you are bidden.” And [through Our messengers] We revealed unto him this decree: “The last remnant of those [sinners] shall be wiped out in the morn.” (15:65-66)

"None of you look back," in an abstract sense, means severing relationships with the sinful city, not simply looking back physically. Lot’s wife, a native of Sodom, acted faithlessly toward her husband. She refused to believe in his prophetic mission. Her

story was “propounded as a parable of those bent on denying the truth.”

INTENT TO COMMIT RAPE

For he [Lot] warned them of Our punishing might. Still, they stubbornly cast doubt on these warnings and even demanded he surrender his guests. Whereupon We deprived them of their sight [and thus told them]: “Taste, then, the suffering I inflict when My warnings are disregarded!” (54:36-37)

The expression “deprivation of sight” can be taken literally, or it denotes a veiling of something from one’s consciousness. Consequently, God deprived them of their evil propensities and all moral insight, causing them to undergo bitter suffering in this world and the next.

GOD’S JUDGMENT

And so, when Our judgment came to pass, We turned those [sinful towns] upside down and rained down upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained, one upon another, marked out in thy Sustainer’s sight [for the punishment of those lost in sin]. And these [blows of God-willed doom] are never far from evildoers! (11:82-83) And thereupon the blast [of Our punishment] overtook them at sunrise, and We turned those [sinful towns] upside down and rained down upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained. (15:73-74) All but an older woman, who was among those stayed behind, and then We utterly destroyed the others and rained down upon them a rain [of destruction]: and dire is such rain upon all who let themselves be warned [to no avail]! (26:171-173) We rained a rain [of destruction] upon the others. Behold, what happened in the end to those people lost in sin! (7:84)

Lot’s people [too] gave the lie to all [Our] warnings: [and so], behold, We let loose upon them a deadly storm, and only Lot’s

kinsfolk did We save at the break of dawn, as a blessing from Us. Thus, do We reward all who are grateful? (54:33-35) And indeed, abiding suffering did befall them early on the morrow. (54:38) We shall bring down upon the people of this land a horror from heaven in requital of all their iniquitous doings! And [so it happened; and] thereof, indeed, We have left a clear sign for people who use their reason. (29:34-35)

Stone-hard or petrified clay would be synonymous with “brimstones,” which, in turn, would point to a volcanic eruption, probably in conjunction with a severe earthquake alluded to in the preceding phrase, “We turned those [sinful towns] upside down.” The threat of ultimate doom applies to evildoers of all times. “Dire was the rain” upon those who were warned. Here, this sentence would refer specifically to the sinful people of Sodom and Gomorrah. “A clear sign for people” is an allusion to the Dead Sea—known to this day as Bahr Lut (the Sea of Lot), which covers most of the region in which Sodom and Gomorrah were once situated. Its waters contain a high percentage of sulfur and potash that make it impossible for fish or plants to survive.

SAVING OF LOT’S HOUSEHOLD EXCEPT HIS WIFE

Only Lot’s kinsfolk We saved at the break of dawn as a blessing from Us: thus, We reward all who are grateful. We rescued him and his household—except his wife, who was among those who stayed behind. (7:83) And with time, We brought out [of Lot’s city] such [few] believers as were there, for apart from one [single] house [Lot’s family], We did not find any who had surrendered themselves to Us. And so, We left therein a message for those who fear the grievous suffering [which awaits all evildoers]. (51:35-37)

Lot’s wife, a native of Sodom, chose to remain with her people instead of accompanying her husband, whom she thus betrayed. Contrary to the Biblical account, where Lot’s wife only “looked

back” inadvertently (Genesis 19:26), the Quran clarifies that she remained behind deliberately, being at heart one with the sinning people of Sodom, having no faith in her husband. In the utter destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, We left a message for evildoers.

LOT AMONG THE RIGHTEOUS

Unto Lot, too, We vouchsafed sound judgment and knowledge [of right and wrong] and saved him from that community given to deeds of abomination. [We destroyed those people—for], they were people lost in evil, depraved—whereas him, We admitted unto Our grace: for he was among the righteous. (21:74-75)

SODOM AND GOMORRAH MANKIND’S MORAL HERITAGE

Verily, there are messages indeed for those who can read the signs in all this. For, behold, those [towns] stood by a road that still exists. Verily, herein lies a message indeed for all who believe [in God]. (15:75-77) In this [story], there is a message [unto men], even though most of them will not believe [in it]. But thy Sustainer—He alone—is almighty, a dispenser of grace! (26:174-175) And then We utterly destroyed the others; and, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings both in the morning and at night. Will you not use your reason? (37:136-138)

WARNING TO THE PAGANS OF ARABIA

And they [who now deny Our messages] must unquestionably have come across that town rained upon by a rain of evil. Have they, then, never beheld it [with their mind’s eye]? But nay, they would not believe in the resurrection! Hence, whenever they consider thee, [O Muhammad], they but make thee a target of their mockery, [saying]: “Is this the one whom Allah has sent as an apostle? Indeed, he would almost have led us astray from our

deities had we not been [so] steadfastly attached to them!” But in time, when they see the suffering [that awaits them], they will know who it was that went astray the farthest from the path [of truth]! (25:40-42)

“Those who can read the sign” in its full significance can learn a lesson from the destruction of the twin cities of evil. The phrase “they have come across” may be understood in two ways. The road led from northern Hijaz to Syria, skirting the Dead Sea, to the northeast of where Sodom and Gomorrah were situated.

(1) In its literal sense of “chancing upon” or “passing by,” it applies to the prophet’s contemporaries and opponents, the pagan Meccans, whose customary caravan route to Syria passed close by the Dead Sea and the probable site of Sodom and Gomorrah.

(2) Or in the metaphoric sense of “becoming aware of something” through reading or hearsay—in which case it may refer to people of all times and to the fact that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is part and parcel of humanity’s moral heritage.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual orientation exists on a continuum that ranges from exclusive homosexuality to only heterosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality. Homosexuality is a persistent pattern of same-sex arousal in a person for whom heterosexual arousal is weak or entirely missing. Gay men should be differentiated from pedophiles, who are sexually aroused by children. There are many theories regarding the origins of a person’s sexual orientation, and it is probably the result of the complex interaction of environmental, cognitive, and biological factors. There may be genetic or inborn hormonal factors that play a significant role in sexuality. There is still controversy about whether homosexuality is inherent or a choice that some individuals make (nature versus nurture).

OPPOSITE OR SAME-SEX ATTRACTION OR FEELINGS

Same-sex feelings are not evil themselves, just as opposite-sex attraction isn't. It's challenging to control what we feel and think, but we can control what we do. For a Muslim, sin or virtue lies in their deeds and intentions. Acting upon sexual feelings is a grave sin outside marriage. A Muslim with same-sex or opposite-sex attraction but who does not act upon it for the sake of his faith will be counted as a good deed for which God will reward him on Judgment Day. The well-known saying of the Prophet: "God, exalted be He, says: "If a servant of Mine merely desires to do a righteous deed, I shall count this desire as a good deed; and if he does it, I shall count it tenfold. And if he desires to commit an evil deed but does not commit it, I shall count this as a good deed. Seeing that he refrained from it only for My sake."

The Quran's cardinal principle is that Islamic laws mold society, not vice versa. God's commands cannot be altered to suit human desires, as in secular societies. The Quran condemned homosexuality and heterosexuality outside marriage. The difference is there is a punishment for heterosexual sex outside marriage but not for the sin of homosexuality in the Quran. But God punished the communities of Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire. According to the Prophet, human beings cannot replicate God's punishment. For example, burning a person alive as a punishment is prohibited under Islamic Law.

If, for argument's sake, homosexuality is inborn, then why should homosexuality be considered a sin? According to the Quranic doctrine of morality, sex is not a right but a privilege, which individuals attain to have family and children within the confines of marriage. Marital laws confer protection and aim to provide an environment where children are properly nurtured and their mothers legally protected. Single mothers are the largest poverty group in the United States. There is no possibility of biological children from

a same-sex union, and marriage in a traditional sense will make no sense. Legalizing gay marriage is impossible in traditional Islamic societies.

INVIOLABILITY OF A PERSON'S HOME

You who have attained faith! Do not enter houses other than your own unless you have obtained permission and greeted their inmates. This is [enjoined upon you] for your benefit so that you can bear [your mutual rights] in mind. Hence, [even] if you find no one within [the house], do not enter it until you are given leave; [by the rightful owner] and if you are told, "Turn back," then turn back. (24:27–28)

Every Muslim has a fundamental right to privacy in his own home. What couples do in the privacy of their home may or may not be a sin, but it is none of anyone's business. In Islam, a man is the king of his home. If gay and heterosexual couples keep their relationship private, no one has the right to peek secretly into their affairs. Public display of sex, whether illicit or licit, gay or heterosexual, is a crime even in secular societies.

Chapter 8

JOSEPH (YUSUF IN ARABIC)

Biblically, Jacob had four wives: Leah, Rachel, and two slave girls. Leah and Rachel were sisters and Jacob's first cousins. Jacob fathered twelve sons, who became leaders of Israel's twelve tribes. One of them was Joseph, a key figure in the Old Testament and the Quran. Joseph and Benjamin were full brothers, both sons of Jacob's wife Rachel, while the other ten were their half-brothers. Joseph's mother, Rachel, died while giving birth to Benjamin.

WHY JOSEPH'S STORY IN THE QURAN?

In response to the question, the pagan Quraysh asked the Prophet why the Israelites moved to Egypt. This question was raised because Joseph's story was not generally known to Arabs, and the Prophet never mentioned him before. The Quraysh attempted to expose the Prophet as a phony, expecting no satisfactory answer. But the tables were turned when God revealed to the Prophet the entire Joseph story on the spot. The Quran generally does not provide chronological narratives, but Joseph's story is an exception. The entire twelfth surah is dedicated to Joseph's heartaches and sorrows.

JOSEPH'S DREAM

Lo! Joseph spoke to his father: "O my father I saw [in a dream] eleven stars, as well as the sun and the moon. I saw them prostrate themselves before me!" [Jacob] replied: "O my dear son! Do not relate your dream to your brothers lest [out of envy] they devise an evil scheme against you; Satan is man's open foe! For, [as you were shown in your dream], thy Sustainer will elect you and impart some understanding of the inner meaning of these happenings. And will bestow the full measure of His blessings

upon you and the House of Jacob. Just as aforetime, He bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Thy Sustainer is all-knowing, wise!" Indeed, in [the story of] Joseph and his brothers, there are messages for all who search [the truth]. (12:4-7)

Jacob understood the meaning of his son's dream vision of future greatness, with the eleven stars symbolizing his brothers and the sun and the moon representing his parents. The Quran clarifies that Jacob realized its prophetic quality and profound implications. But the Bible quotes the father as "rebuking" his son (Genesis 37:10) in the assumption that the dream was wishful thinking. "Some understanding of the inner meaning of these happenings" may refer specifically to the promise of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. It may also refer to future events for which God will impart some understanding of its innermost meaning (as distinct from its outward appearance) to Joseph. The use of the words "some understanding" in the last sentence indicates that absolute knowledge of what a thing or event implies rests with God alone. Even God-elected prophets, though their spiritual vision is much broader than ordinary men, are granted only partial insight into the mysteries of God's creation.

TREACHERY BY HALF-BROTHERS

Now [Joseph's half-brothers] spoke [to one another]: "Truly, Joseph and his brother [Benjamin] are dearer to our father than we are, even though we are so many. Our father is surely suffering from an aberration!" [Said one of them]: "Slay Joseph, or else drive him away to some [faraway] land, so that your father's regard may be for you alone: and after this is done, you will be [free to repent and to live again as] righteous people!" Another of them said: "Do not slay Joseph, rather—if you must do something—cast him into the dark depths of this well, [whence] some caravan may pick him up." [On this they agreed, and

thereupon] they spoke [thus to their father]: "O our father! Why will you not trust us with Joseph, seeing that we are indeed his well-wishers? Let him go out with us tomorrow, that he may enjoy himself and play and we shall guard him well!" [Jacob] answered: "It grieves me indeed [to suppose] that you might take him with you, for I dread lest the wolf devour him at a moment when you are heedless of him!" Said they: "Surely, if the wolf devours him, notwithstanding that we are so many—then we should also perish!" (12:8-14)

The phrase "free to repent and live again as righteous" reflects Joseph's brethren's twisted moral sense. The term *jub* refers to a desert well cut through the earth or rock and not cased with stone. Such a well did not contain enough water to drown Joseph. However, it was deep enough to hide him from sight, and some caravan would take him to a faraway land.

CASTING JOSEPH INTO THE WELL

And so, when they took him away, they cast him into the dark depths of the well. And We revealed [this] unto him [Joseph]: "You will yet remind them of this their deed at a time when they shall not perceive [who you are]!" [See verses 89-90 below.] And at nightfall, they came to their father, in tears, and said: "O our father! We went off racing and left Joseph behind with our things, and the wolf devoured him!

Nevertheless, [we know] you would not believe us even though we speak the truth"—and they produced his tunic with false blood upon it. [But Jacob] exclaimed: "No, but it is your minds that have made [so terrible] a happening seem a matter of little account to you! But [for myself], patience in adversity is most goodly [in God's sight]; and it is to Allah [alone] that I pray to give me the strength to bear the misfortune which you have described to me." (12:15-18)

Jacob did not believe the wolf tale, but knowing his sons' envy of Joseph, Jacob realized they had done grievous harm to him. Nevertheless, as is evident from Jacob's expression of hope in verse 83 below, he was not convinced Joseph was dead.

JOSEPH'S JOURNEY TO EGYPT

There came a caravan, and they sent forth their drawer of water. He let down his bucket into the well [and when he saw Joseph], he exclaimed: "Oh, what a lucky find, this boy!" And they hid him, intending to sell him, but Allah had full knowledge of all they were doing. They sold him for a small sum of a few silver coins, thus, low did they value him. (12:19-20)

According to the Bible (Genesis 37:25), the caravan of "Ishmaelites"-i.e., the Arabs came from Gilead with their camels bearing spice, balm, and myrrh, carrying it down to Egypt." Gilead is the Biblical name for the region east of Jordan.

JOSEPH ADOPTED BY AL-AZIZ

And the man from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his stay [with us] honorable; he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son." And We gave Joseph a secure place on Earth, and [We did this] so that We might impart unto him some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings. For Allah always prevails in whatever His purpose is, but most people know it not. (12:21)

The Quran does not mention the name or position of the man who adopted Joseph. However, it later references him (see below) as Al-Aziz ("the mighty one"), points to his being a high official or nobleman.

EVIL TEMPTATIONS

When he reached full manhood, We bestowed upon him the ability to judge [between right and wrong], as well as [innate] knowledge: for thus We reward the doers of good. And [it so happened] she in whose house he was living [conceived a passion for him and] sought to make him yield himself unto her. She bolted the doors and said, "Come you unto me!" [But Joseph] answered: "May Allah preserve me! Goodly has my master made my stay [in this house]! To no-good end come they who do [such] wrong!" And indeed, she desired him, and he wanted her. [He would have succumbed] had he not seen [in this temptation] evidence of his Sustainer's truth. Thus [We willed it to be] so that We might avert from him all evil and all deeds of abomination—for he was truly one of Our servants. (12:22-24)

Joseph was tempted as any man, but he resisted the evil of fornication. The passage points out that virtue's moral significance consists in one's inner victory over a wrongful desire, not in the absence of such a desire. The well-known saying of the Prophet: "God, exalted be He, says: "If a servant of Mine merely desires to do a righteous deed, I shall count this desire as a good deed; and if he does it, I shall count it tenfold. And if he desires to commit an evil deed but does not commit it, I shall count this as a good deed. Seeing that he refrained from it only for My sake'—i.e., in consequence of moral consideration, described as "evidence of God's truth."

FALSE ACCUSATION OF RAPE

They both rushed to the door, and she [grabbed and] rent his tunic from behind—and [lo!] they met her lord at the door! Said she: "What ought to be the punishment of one who had evil designs on [the virtue of] your wife—[what] but imprisonment or a [yet more] grievous chastisement?" [Joseph] exclaimed: "It was she who sought to make me yield myself unto her!" Now one of those

present, a member of her household, suggested this. "If his tunic was torn from the front, then she is telling the truth, and he is a liar. If his tunic was torn from behind, then she is lying, and he is speaking the truth." And when [her husband] noticed Joseph's tunic was torn from behind, he said: "This is [an instance] of your guile, O womankind! Awesome is your guile! [But] Joseph, let this pass! And you, [O wife], ask forgiveness for your sin—for you have been greatly at fault!" (12:25-29)

The tunic being torn from behind or front does not appear in the Biblical account. The man told Joseph not to mention this to anyone, implying that the husband was prepared to forgive and forget. Here again, the Quranic narrative differs from the Bible story, since, according to the latter (Genesis 39:19-20), the husband immediately believed the false accusation and cast Joseph into prison.

GOSSIP AMONG WOMEN OF THE CITY

Now the women of the city spoke [thus]. "The wife of this nobleman is trying to induce her slave-boy to yield himself unto her! Her love for him has pierced her heart; we perceive she is undoubtedly suffering from an aberration!" Thereupon, when she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them, and prepared for them a sumptuous repast, and handed each of them a knife and said [to Joseph]: "Come out and show yourself to them!" And when the women saw him, they were exceedingly amazed at his beauty, and [so flustered were they that] they cut their hands [with their knives], exclaiming, "Allah saves us! This is no mortal man! This is a noble angel!" (12:30-31)

WRONGFUL IMPRISONMENT OF JOSEPH

Said she: "This is he whom you have blamed me! And, indeed, I tried to make him yield himself unto me, but he remained chaste. Now, however, if he does not do what I bid him, he shall certainly

be imprisoned and among the despised!" Said he: "O my Sustainer! Prison is more to me than [compliance with] what these women invite me to. Unless Thou turn away their guile from me, I might yet yield to their allure and become one of those unaware [of right and wrong]." And his Sustainer responded to his prayer and freed him from the threat of their guile: He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing. For, presently, it occurred to the nobleman and his household [even] after they had seen all the signs [of Joseph's innocence]—that they might as well imprison him for a time. (12:32-35)

Joseph was imprisoned not because his master believed him guilty. Instead, in his weakness, he wanted to appease his wife, being entirely submissive to her.

DREAMS OF FELLOW PRISONERS AND THE KING

Now two young men were sent to prison simultaneously with Joseph. One of them said: "I saw myself [in a dream] pressing wine." And the other said: "I saw myself [in a dream] carrying bread on my head, and birds ate thereof." [And both entreated Joseph]: "Let us know the real meaning of this! We understand you are one of those who knows well [how to interpret dreams]." (12:36)

According to the Biblical account, the two young men in prison with Joseph were the king's cupbearer and baker. They were imprisoned for unspecified offenses. Thus, the Quran indicates that Joseph's reputation for wisdom and dream interpretation preceded him to prison.

JOSEPH'S PROSELYTIZING HIS FELLOW PRISONERS

[Joseph] answered: "Before there comes unto you the meal which you are [daily] fed, I shall have informed you of the real meaning of your dreams, [so that you might know what is to come] before

it comes unto you: for this is [part] of the knowledge which my Sustainer has imparted to me. I have left behind me the ways of people who do not believe in Allah and persistently refuse to acknowledge the truth of life to come. I follow the creed of my forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not conceivable that we should [be allowed to] ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah. This is [an outcome] of Allah's bounty unto us and unto all humankind—but most people are ungrateful. O my companions in imprisonment! Which is more reasonable: [belief in the existence of many divine] lords, each of them different from the other—or [in] One God, who holds absolute sway over all that exists? All that you worship instead of Allah is nothing but [empty] names whom you have invented—you and your forefathers—[and] for which Allah has bestowed no warrant from on high. Judgment [as to what is right and what is wrong] rests with Allah alone—[and] He has ordained you should worship none but Him: this is the [one] ever-true faith, but most people know it not." (12:37-40)

INTERPRETATION OF FELLOW PRISONERS' DREAMS

"[And now], O my companions in imprisonment, [I shall tell you the meaning of your dreams.] As for one of you two, he will [again] give his Lord [the King] wine to drink, but as for the other, he will be crucified, and birds will eat off his head. [But whatever be your future], the matter on which you have asked me to enlighten you has been decided [by God]." And [thereupon Joseph] said unto one of the two whom he considered saved: "Mention me unto your Lord [when you are free]!" But Satan caused him to forget to mention [Joseph] to his Lord, so he remained in prison a few [more] years. (12:41-42)

KING'S DREAM

[One day] the King said: "I saw [in a dream] seven fat cows devoured by seven emaciated ones, and seven green ears [of wheat] next to [seven] others withered. O you nobles! Enlighten me about [the meaning of] my dream if you can interpret dreams!" They answered: "[This is one] of the most involved and confusing of dreams, and we have no deep knowledge of the actual meaning of dreams." At that, one of the two [erstwhile prisoners] who had been saved, and [who suddenly] remembered [Joseph] after all that time, spoke [thus]: "It is I who can inform you of the real meaning of this [dream]; so, let me go [in search of it]." (12:43-45)

The cupbearer addresses the assembly, not the King alone, hence the plural form of "you."

JOSEPH'S EXPLANATION

[And he went to see Joseph in prison and said to him]: "Joseph, O you truthful one! Enlighten us about [the meaning of a dream in which] seven fat cows were devoured by seven emaciated ones, and seven green ears [of wheat appeared] next to [seven] others that withered. So, I may return [with your explanation] unto the people [of the court, and], they may come to know [what manner of man you are]!" [Joseph] replied: "You shall sow for seven years as usual but let all [the grain] that you harvest remain [untouched] in its ear, excepting only a little, of which you may eat. For, after that [period of seven good years], there will come seven harsh [years], which will devour all that you shall have laid up for them, excepting merely a little of that which you shall have kept in store. And after that, there will come a year when the people will be delivered from distress. And they will press [the oil and wine as before]" (12:46-49).

They will be "delivered from all distress" and granted rain. However, the crops of Egypt depend entirely on the annual Nile floods. The river's water level was dependent on the amount of rainfall in its upper reaches.

CONFESSION OF GUILT BY ALL THE WOMEN

[As soon as Joseph's interpretation was conveyed to him], the King said: "Bring him before me!" But when the [King's] messenger came unto him, [Joseph] said: "Go back to your Lord and ask him [first to find out the truth] about those women who cut their hands—for [until now, it is] my Sustainer [alone who] has full knowledge of their guile!" [Thereupon the King sent for those women, and when they came], he asked: "What was it that you hoped to achieve when you sought to make Joseph yield himself unto you?" Women answered: "Allah saves us! We did not perceive the least evil [intention] on his part!" [And] the wife of Joseph's former master [great one (al-Aziz)] exclaimed: "Now has the truth come to light! It was I who sought to make him yield himself unto me—whereas he was indeed speaking the truth!" [When Joseph learned what had happened, he said: "I asked for] this, so that [my former master] might know that I did not betray him behind his back and that Allah does not bless with His guidance the artful schemes of those who betray their trust. And yet, I am not trying to absolve myself, for man's inner self does incite [him] to evil and the saved are only they upon whom my Sustainer bestows His grace. My Sustainer is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!" (12:50-53)

Joseph declined freedom and asked the king to investigate whether he was innocent or guilty. Joseph, as a prophet, wanted his name cleared before release from jail. "Man's inner self incites [him] to evil" and is filled with impulses, which often conflict with what the mind regards as virtuous. Joseph's stress on the weakness inherent to human nature is a sublime expression of humility on the part of

one who himself overcame that weakness. As the sequence shows, he attributes his moral victory not to himself but solely to the grace and mercy of God.

TURNING AROUND OF JOSEPH'S FORTUNE

The King said: "Bring him unto me so that I can attach him to my person." And when he had spoken with him, [the King] said: "[From] this day you shall be of high standing with us, invested with all trust!" [Joseph] replied: "Place in my charge the storehouses of the land; I shall be a good and knowing keeper." And We established Joseph securely in the land [of Egypt]: he had complete mastery over it, [doing] whatever he willed. [Thus do] We cause Our grace to descend upon whomever We will, and We do not fail to requite the doers of good. In the eyes of those who have attained faith and are conscious of Us, reward in the life to come is a far greater good. [than any reward in this world]. (12:54-57)

"We do not fail to requite the doers of good" sometimes in this world but invariably in the hereafter. Joseph requested the king to be in command of storehouses to ensure an efficient build-up of grain reserves during the coming years of plenty, knowing well that they would be followed by seven years of scarcity. It is evident from the sequence that his request was granted and that he could fulfill the task he had set for himself.

FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH HIS BROTHERS

[After some years], Joseph's brothers came [to Egypt] and presented themselves before him: and he knew them [at once], whereas they did not recognize him. (12:58)

Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy wheat from the stores, which Joseph had accumulated during seven years of plenty. All the countries near Egypt were now affected by the famine—which he

had predicted—and Egypt alone had a surplus, whose distribution he personally supervised (see Genesis 41:54-57). Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. They bartered their goods for wheat. Barter was the most common form of trade in ancient times.

BRING BENJAMIN NEXT TIME

And when he [Joseph] provided them with their provisions, he said: "[When you come here next], bring unto me that brother of yours from your father's side. Do you not realize I have given [you] full measure and been the best host? But if you do not bring him unto me, you shall never again receive a single measure [of grain] from me, nor shall you [be allowed to] come near me!" They answered: "We shall try to persuade his father to part with him, and we shall do [our utmost]!" And [Joseph] said to his servants: "Place their merchandise in their camel-packs, so they can find it there when they come home, and hence be the more eager to return." (12:59-62)

Joseph used to allot foreign grain buyers one camel load per person. After giving them their provisions, Joseph asked his brothers to bring their half-brother Benjamin with them the next time. (Benjamin was Joseph's full brother, whereas the other ten had different mothers.) The youngest of Jacob's children, Benjamin had not accompanied his brothers on their first journey to Egypt, but they had presumably mentioned him during their conversation with Joseph.

REQUEST TO TAKE BENJAMIN ON THEIR NEXT TRIP

When they returned to their father, [Joseph's brothers] said: "O our father! All grain is [to be] withheld from us [in the future unless we bring Benjamin with us]: send therefore, our brother with us, so that we may obtain our measure [of grain]; and we shall guard him well!" [Jacob] replied: "Shall I trust you with

him in the same way as I trusted you with his brother [Joseph] aforetime? [No], but Allah's guardianship is better [than yours], for He is the most merciful of the merciful!" Thereupon, when they opened their packs, they discovered their merchandise had been returned to them; [and] they said: "O our father! What more could we desire? Here is our merchandise: it has been returned to us! [If you send Benjamin with us], we shall [again] bring food for our family, and shall guard our brother [well], and receive in addition another camel-load of grain. That [which we have brought the first time] was but a scanty measure." Said [Jacob]: "I will not send him with you until you give me a solemn pledge, before Allah, that you will indeed bring him back unto me unless you yourselves are encompassed [by death]!" And when they had given him their pledge, [Jacob] said: "Allah is witness to all that we say!" (12:63-66)

ENTER THE CITY BY DIFFERENT GATES

And he [Jacob] added: "O my sons! Do not enter [the city through] one gate, but by different gates. Yet [even so], I can be of no avail to you against [anything that may be willed by] Allah. Judgment [as to what will happen] rests with Allah. In Him have I placed my trust: for, all who have trust [in His existence] must place their trust in Him alone." But although they entered [Joseph's city] in the way, their father had bidden them; this proved to be of no avail against [the plan of] Allah. [His request] served only to satisfy Jacob's heartfelt desire [to protect them]. Thanks to what We had imparted unto him, he was indeed endowed with the knowledge [that God's will must always prevail]; but most people know it not. (12:67-68)

Jacob advised his sons to enter the city by different gates, probably to avoid undue attention in a foreign land and possibly falling prey to intrigue. He followed only an instinctive, humanly understandable urge when giving his sons this advice. As he pointed

out on parting, "Judgment as to what is to happen rests with none but God." This stress on man's dependence on God—a fundamental tenet of Islam—explains why Jacob's advice (which is irrelevant to the story) is mentioned in the above Quranic narrative. As shown in the sequence, they and their father suffered severe distress before their adventures ended happily.

SECOND ENCOUNTER WITH ALL HIS BROTHERS

And when [the sons of Jacob] presented themselves before Joseph; he drew his brother [Benjamin] unto himself, saying [to him in secret]: "Behold, I am your brother! So, you grieve not over their past doings!" (12:69)

Thus, contrary to the Biblical account, Joseph disclosed his identity to Benjamin long before revealing himself to his ten half-brothers. The words "their past doings" refer to their treacherous behavior toward himself, which Joseph presumably disclosed to Benjamin.

KING'S CUP IN BENJAMIN'S PACK AS A GIFT

[Later], when he provided them with their provisions, he [Joseph] placed the [King's] drinking cup in his brother's camel-pack. And [as they were leaving the city], a herald called out: "O you people of the caravan! You are thieves!" Turning towards the herald and his companions, the brothers asked: "What is it that you miss?" They answered: "We miss the King's goblet, and he who produces it shall receive a camel-load [of grain as a reward]!" And [the herald added:] "I pledge myself to this [promise]!" Said [the brothers]: "By Allah! Well, do you know that we have not committed deeds of corruption in this land and have not been stealing!" [The Egyptians] said: "But what shall be the requital of this [deed] if you are [proved to be] liars?" [The brothers] replied: "It's requital? He in whose camel-pack [the cup] is found—he shall be [enslaved as] a requital thereof!" Thus, we [ourselves] requite the doers of [such] wrong. (12:70-75)

Joseph had placed the royal cup as a present in his favorite brother's bag. He did this secretly, without informing his servants. This is because he did not want anyone, least of all his ten half-brothers, to know his preference for Benjamin. When Joseph's servants realized the king's drinking cup was missing, they remembered nobody had been near it except the sons of Jacob. So it occurred to them that it was they who had taken it. Nowhere in the Quran does it mention they made this accusation on Joseph's orders.

DISCOVERY OF THE CUP IN BENJAMIN'S POSSESSION

Thereupon [they were brought before Joseph to be searched. He began with the bags of his half-brothers before his brother [Benjamin]. In the end, he brought the drinking cup out of his brother's bag. In this way, We did contrive for Joseph [the attainment of his heart's desire]. Under the King's law, he would [otherwise] not have been able to detain his brother had not Allah so willed. We raise to [high] degrees [of knowledge] whomever We will—but above everyone who is endowed with knowledge is the One who knows all. [As soon as the cup emerged out of Benjamin's bag, the brothers] exclaimed: "If he has stolen—well, a brother of his used to steal aforesaid!" Thereupon, Joseph said to himself, without revealing his thought: "You are far worse in this respect, and Allah is fully aware of what you are saying." (12:76-77)

"Brother of his" refers to Benjamin's full brother, Joseph. Unaware they were standing before Joseph, the brothers wanted to vilify him to dissociate themselves more effectively from Benjamin, who now appeared convicted of theft. Joseph said, you were far more sinister since you stole Joseph from his father.

DETENTION OF BENJAMIN IN EGYPT

Joseph wanted to keep Benjamin for himself. Under Egyptian law, he could not do this without the consent of his half-brothers, who were the legal guardians of their minor brother. They were bound by their father's solemn pledge. The latter could not have agreed to Benjamin remaining behind. The only other alternative open to Joseph was to disclose his identity to them. However, he was not yet prepared to go so far. He was obliged to allow Benjamin to depart with his brothers.

The discovery of the gift by Joseph (see verse 70 above) changed everything. Now, Benjamin appeared guilty of theft, and Joseph was entitled to claim him as his slave according to Egyptian law. It is noteworthy that his hands were not amputated in this case, and instead, he was imprisoned. Cutting Benjamin's hands would have been a grave injustice since he was not guilty of stealing.

The incident of the cup indicates its outcome was neither planned nor even foreseen by Joseph. The meaning of this story is now clear: It is a further illustration of the basic doctrine that judgment as to what is to happen rests with none but God.

VOLUNTARY STAYING OF THE OLDEST BROTHER WITH BENJAMIN

They said: "O you great one! He has an old father: detain, therefore, one of us in his stead. We realize you are a doer of good!" He answered: "May Allah preserve us from [the sin of] detaining any other than him with whom we have found our property—for then we would indeed be evildoers!" And so, when they lost all hope of [moving] him, they withdrew to take counsel [among themselves]. The eldest of them said: "Do you not remember your father has bound you by a solemn pledge before Allah. And how, before that, did you fail in relation to Joseph? Hence, I shall not depart from this land until my father gives me leave or Allah passes judgment in my favor: for He is the best of

all judges. [And as for you other], return to your father and say: 'O, our father! Your son has stolen, but we [can] bear witness to no more than what has become known to us. [i.e., the finding of the King's cup in Benjamin's bag] [Although we gave you our pledge], we could not guard against something that [lay hidden in the future. Hence], was beyond the reach of our perception. And you ask in the town in which we were [at the time], and of the people of the caravan with whom we traveled hither, and [you will find that] we are indeed telling the truth!'" (12:78-82)

FATHER'S SORROW AND HOPE

[When they returned to their father and told him what had happened], he exclaimed: "No, but it is your [own] minds that have made [so terrible] a happening seem a matter of little account to you! But [as for myself] patience in adversity is most goodly. Allah may well bring them all [back] unto me: He alone is all-knowing, truly wise!" But he turned away from them and said: "O, woe is me for Joseph!" And his eyes became dim from the grief with which he was filled. (12:83-84)

Said [his sons]: "By Allah! You will never cease to remember Joseph until you are broken in body, spirit, or dead!" He answered: "It is only to Allah that I complain of my deep grief and sorrow: for I know, from Allah, something that you do not know. [Hence], O my sons go forth and try to obtain some tidings of Joseph and his brother, and do not lose hope of Allah's life-giving mercy: none but people who deny the truth can ever lose hope of Allah's life-giving mercy." (12:85-87)

Jacob lost three of his sons: Benjamin and the eldest son (who remained in Egypt), and Joseph, of whose alleged death Jacob was never fully convinced (see above). Jacob's eyes became dim with the tears that filled them. Although Jacob was now deprived of three of his sons, his grief for Joseph was the most painful because he was

the only one of the three whom Jacob did not know whether he was dead or alive.

"Something that you do not know," namely, "judgment as to what is to happen rests with none but God," and "all who have trust [in His existence] must place their trust in Him alone" (verse 67). Jacob now seeks to impress upon his sons; the twin ideas underlie the whole surah. In addition, his remembrance of Joseph's prophetic dream (verse 4) and his conviction at the time God would elect his beloved son for His special grace (verse 6). It fills Jacob with renewed hope that Joseph is still alive—and this explains the directives he gives his sons in the following sentence.

THE THIRD ENCOUNTER WITH BROTHERS

[The sons of Jacob went back to Egypt and to Joseph] and when they presented themselves before him, they said: "O, you the great one! Hardship has visited our folk and us, and so we have brought but scanty merchandise [which they intended to barter for grain], but give us a full measure [of grain] and be charitable to us: Allah rewards those who give in charity!" He replied: "Do you remember what you did to Joseph and his brother when you were still unaware [of right and wrong]?" They exclaimed: "Why—is it indeed you who is Joseph?" He answered: "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Allah has indeed been gracious to us. If one is conscious of Him and patient in adversity—Allah does not fail to requite the doers of good!" (12:88-90)

In this statement: "What you did to Joseph and his brother:" by coupling his name with Benjamin, he possibly hinted at his brothers' early envy and hatred of the two sons of Rachel. Alternatively, the mention of Benjamin may have been due to the readiness with which they accepted the evidence of the latter's guilt (verse 77).

JOSEPH INVITES ALL HIS FAMILY TO EGYPT

[The brothers] said: "By Allah! Most certainly, has Allah raised you high above us, and we were indeed but sinners!" Said he: "No reproach shall be uttered today against you. May Allah forgive you your sins: for He is the most merciful of the merciful!" "[And now] take this tunic of mine and lay it over my father's face, and he will recover his sight. And thereupon come [back] to me with all your family." (12:91-93)

My father will cease to weep for me, and the dimness of his sight caused by unhappiness and constant weeping will disappear on learning that I am alive.

REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

As soon as the caravan [with which Jacob's sons were traveling] was on its way, their father said [to the surrounding people]: "Behold, was it not that you might consider me a dotard, [I would say] I truly feel the breath of Joseph [in the air]!" They answered: "By Allah! You are indeed still lost in your old aberration!" But when the bearer of good tidings came [with Joseph's tunic], he laid it over his face; and he regained his sight, [and] exclaimed: "Did I not tell you, 'I know, from Allah, something that you do not know'?" [See verse 86 above.] [His sons] answered: "O our father! Ask Allah to forgive us our sins, for we were sinners." He said: "I shall ask my Sustainer to forgive you: He alone is truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace!" (12:94-98)

REUNITING OF JOSEPH WITH HIS PARENTS

And when they [all arrived in Egypt and] presented themselves before Joseph, he drew his parents unto himself, saying, "Enter Egypt! If Allah so wills, you shall be secure [from all evil]!" And he raised his parents to the highest place of honor, and they [all] fell before Him, [God] prostrating themselves in adoration. (12:99-100)

According to the Biblical account, Joseph's mother, Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin. We may, therefore, assume the "mother" implied in the term "parents" was another of Jacob's wives, who had brought up Joseph and Benjamin; this would agree with the ancient Arabian custom of applying the designation "mother" to a foster mother. The highest place of honor (lit., "onto the throne") is used in the metaphorical sense of this word. The personal pronoun in "before Him" relates to God since it is inconceivable that Joseph would have allowed his parents to prostrate themselves before himself.

THE MEANING OF JOSEPH'S ORIGINAL DREAM

Thereupon [Joseph] said: "O my father! This is the true meaning of my dream long ago, which my Sustainer has made come true. And He was indeed good to me when He freed me from the prison, and [when] He brought you [all unto me] from the desert after Satan had sown discord between my brothers and me. My Sustainer is unfathomable in [the way He brings about] whatever He wills: He alone is all-knowing, truly wise! (12:100)

JOSEPH'S PRAYER

O, my Sustainer! Thou hast indeed bestowed upon me something of power and hast imparted me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. [See verse 6 above.] Originator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art near unto me in this world and in the life to come, let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto Thee and make me one with the righteous!" (12:101)

The fulfillment of Joseph's childhood dream consisted of high dignity with which he was now invested. His parents and brothers had emigrated from Canaan to Egypt for his sake. One cannot expect the fulfillment of a dream to be a replica of the dream itself (alluding to the symbolic prostration of the eleven stars, the sun, and the moon mentioned in verse 4 of this surah). The mentioning of

"my Sustainer is unfathomable" further accents the theme that judgment as to what is to happen rests with none, but God and that absolute power and dominion belong to God alone.

MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE JOSEPH STORY

This account of something beyond your perception, We [now] reveal unto you, [O Prophet]: for you were not with Joseph's brothers when they resolved on what they were going to do and wove their schemes [against him]. However, strongly you may desire it—most people will not believe [in this revelation], although you do not ask them any reward for it. It is, but [God's] reminder unto all mankind. But [then]—many signs are there in the heavens, and on Earth which they pass by [unthinkingly], and they turn their backs! And most of them do not even believe in Allah without [also] ascribing divine powers to other beings beside Him. Do they then feel free from the fear that there might fall upon them the overwhelming terror of Allah's chastisement, or that the Last Hour might come upon them suddenly, without them being aware [of its approach]? (12:102-107)

Due to a severe drought in Canaan, Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt with Joseph. After Jacob died seventeen years later, Joseph carried Jacob's remains back to Canaan and gave him a dignified burial at the same place where Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac were buried.

FINAL COMMENTS

As narrated in the Quran, the Prophet Joseph's story agrees in the main, but not entirely, with the Biblical version (Genesis 37 and 39-46). What distinguishes the Quranic treatment of the story in a more profound sense is its spiritual tenor. In the Bible, Joseph's life is presented as a romantic account of the envy to which his youthful innocence is exposed, of the vicissitudes he subsequently suffers, and finally, of his worldly triumph over his brothers.

The Quran uses it primarily as an illustration of God's unfathomable direction in men's affairs. For example, the Quranic statement, "It may well be that you hate a thing the while it is good for you, and it maybe you love a thing the while it is bad for you: and God knows, whereas you do not know" (2:216). This surah might be described as a series of variations on the theme that judgment as to what is to happen rests with none but God, explicitly enunciated only in verse 67, but running like an unspoken leitmotif throughout the story of Joseph.

Chapter 9

MOSES (MUSA IN ARABIC)

HENBREWS IN EGYPT

In Egypt, Joseph's descendants were fruitful and increased significantly. Now there arose another king in Egypt, and he said the people of Israel were too many. Egyptians feared Jews might join foreign invaders (Exodus 1:10). Earlier, the ancient Hyksos dynasty invaded Egypt and allied with the Hebrews. To protect themselves against this danger, they decided to have every male Hebrew child killed, as mentioned in the Quran and the Bible. Historically, deep prejudice against Jews was rooted in their ethnicity, culture, and religion. The Hebrew prophet, teacher, leader, lawgiver, and warrior, Moshe or Moses, delivered his people from Egyptian slavery.

WHO WAS PHARAOH?

The designation "Pharaoh" is not a proper name, but a title borne by all ancient Egyptian kings. Some Egyptologists assume the "Evil Pharaoh" of the Quran and the Bible was Ramses II (about 1324-1258 B.C.), while others identify him with his unlucky predecessor, Tut-ankh-amen, or even with Thotmes (or Thutmosis) III, who lived in the 15th century B.C. However, these "identifications" are purely speculative and have no definitive historical value. The ancient Egyptians worshipped many gods, and each pharaoh was considered an incarnation of the divine principle. He claimed and received his people's adoration as their Lord All-Highest, combining all godlike qualities.

WHO WAS HAMAN?

This Haman was Pharaoh's chief adviser, not to be confused with the Persian Haman of the Old Testament (Book of Esther 3). Just as

Pharaoh was the title given to kings, "Haman" was the title of the highest priest of Egypt. Haman is the Arabicized echo of Ha-Amen, a compound designation given to every high priest of the Egyptian god Amon. The cult of Amon was paramount in Egypt; his high priest held a rank second only to the reigning Pharaoh. The assumption that the person spoken of in the Quran as Haman was indeed the high priest of the cult of Amon is strengthened by Pharaoh's demand (mentioned in verses 20:38 and 40:36-37) that Haman erect for him "a lofty tower" from which he could "have a glimpse at or ascend to the God of Moses." This may be an allusion to the priestly purpose of the great pyramids of Egypt and the function of the high priest as their chief architect.

MOSES OF THE QURAN

Moses is the most frequently mentioned prophet in the Quran. Moses' life story is mentioned in 25 chapters, and his name is cited 136 times in the Quran. The Quran, however, does not give us a chronological narrative, for historical narrative is never its purpose. Whenever the Quran refers to past events—whether recorded in the Bible or alive in the Arabian tradition—it does so exclusively to bring out elements relevant to the ethical teachings it propounds and not to narrate a story as such; this explains the fragmentary character of these references and allusions throughout the Quran. The Quran always gives an independent description of stories, legends, and historical events and never refers to the Bible for explanation.

I have pieced together the verses to present a coherent version of Moses' story from a Quranic perspective. In some of these verses, God directly speaks to Moses, but most are general.

REFERENCES FROM MECCAN AND MEDINA SURAHS

The reason for the frequent Quranic references to the story of Israelites delivery from Pharaoh's bondage was that the Muslims in

Mecca were suppressed and disinherited, struggling in an unbelieving society due to their exclusive monotheistic beliefs. Their plight was comparable to the Israelites before them (28:4-5) and how a small band of believers under the leadership of a legendary warrior prophet called Moses overcame Pharaoh, the strongest man alive at that time. That explains many references to Moses and Israelites' struggle found in Surahs from the Mecca period.

It is noteworthy that the story of Moses in the Quran depicts the purely human aspects of his life—the impulses, perplexities, and errors that are part of the human condition. As a result, the Quran emphasizes such issues to counter any potential tendency to attribute superhuman or semi-divine qualities to God's apostles.

Unfriendly and biased critics of Islam label the Quran anti-Jewish because it criticizes certain Jewish practices. However, the Quran condemned Arabs for their polytheistic beliefs. These critics need to read the pro-Jewish story of Moses and the Israelites as narrated in the Quran.

(1) THE EVILS OF PHARAOH

SLAUGHTERING THE ISRAELITES' SONS

These are messages of divine writ clear in itself and clearly showing the truth. We [now] convey to you some of the stories of Moses and Pharaoh, setting forth the truth for [the benefit of] people who will believe. Behold, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes. One group of them he deemed inferior; he would slaughter their sons and spare [only] their women: for, behold, he was one of those who spread corruption [on earth]. (28:2-4) [Remember the time] when We saved you from the Pharaoh's people, who afflicted you with cruel suffering, slaughtered your sons and spared (only) your women [see Exodus I, 15-16, 22]—which was an awesome trial from your Sustainer (2:49).

“Divided people into castes” refers to the division of people into high and low-born, as we see today in Hinduism: a division the Quran condemns. The group Pharaoh “deemed inferior” to was the Israelites, placed on the lowest rung of the Egyptian social scale. They were deprived of almost all human rights.

ISRAELITES CHOSEN AS FORERUNNERS OF MONOTHEISM

But it was Our will to bestow Our favor upon those [people] who were deemed [so] inferior in the land, and to make them forerunners in faith, and to make them heirs [to Pharaoh's glory]. And to establish them securely on earth and let Pharaoh, Haman, and their hosts experience through those [children of Israel] the very thing against which they sought to protect themselves. (28:5-6)

The Jews were the first to accept a monotheistic creed in a clear, unequivocal formulation and thus became the forerunners of

Christianity and Islam. Jews are chosen people because they are the first to accept monotheism, not because they are descendants of Abraham. Jews are the elder brothers of monotheism. They accepted the worship of one God more than a thousand years before the Arabs did. The Arabs were still not ready to accept Prophet Muhammad's monotheistic creed.

RESCUE OF INFANT MOSES

And so, [when he was born], We inspired [thus] the mother of Moses: “Suckle him [for a time], and then when thou hast cause to fear for him, cast him into the river and have no fear and do not grieve - for We shall restore him to thee and shall make him one of Our message-bearers!” (28:7) And, indeed, We bestowed Our favor upon thee (Moses) at a time long since past, when We inspired thy mother with this inspiration: ‘Place him in a chest and throw it into the river.’ Thereupon, the river will cast him ashore, [and] one who is an enemy unto him and Me will adopt him.” “And [thus early] I spread Mine Own love over thee. And [this] so that thou might be formed under Mine eye. (20:37-39) And so, she (mother of Moses) said to his sister, “Follow him” - and [the girl] watched him from afar, while they [who had taken him in] were unaware of it. (28:11)

According to Biblical tradition, Moses' parents, Amram and Jochebed, hid Moses for three months and set him afloat on the Nile in a reed basket. Moses' sister stood at a distance to see what would happen. Soon, the Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river. She saw the basket among the reeds, sent her maid to fetch it, opened it, and saw the baby. She knew that this was one of the Hebrews' children.

The Pharaoh is described as an enemy of God due to his overweening arrogance and cruelty. He also claimed divine status. Since he hated and feared the Jews, the Pharaoh was an enemy of infant Moses.

“Under Mine eyes” or under my protection, with the destiny I have decreed for you. This is a reference to Moses’ upbringing within the cultural environment of the royal palace and his subsequent acquisition of the ancient wisdom of Egypt. These circumstances qualify Moses for his future leadership and the unique mission God had in view for him.

ADOPTION BY THE PHARAOH’S WIFE

And [some of] Pharaoh’s household found [and spared] him: for [We willed] that he would become an enemy unto them and be [a source] of grief, knowing that Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts were sinners indeed! Now the wife of Pharaoh said: “A joy to the eye [could this child be] for me and thee! Slay him not: he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son!” And they had no idea [of what he was to become]. (28:8-9)

BABY MOSES IS RESTORED TO HIS MOTHER

On the morrow, however, an aching void grew in the heart of Moses’ mother. She would indeed have disclosed everything about him had We not endowed her heart with enough strength to keep alive her faith [in Our promise]. (28:10) Now from the beginning, We caused him to refuse the breast of [Egyptian] nurses, and [when his sister came to know this], she said: “Shall I guide you to a family that might rear him for you, and look after him with goodwill?” Thus, We restored him to his mother so that it might gladden her eyes, grieve no longer, and she might know that Allah’s promise always comes true—even though most of them know it not! (28:12-13) “[And thou wert under Mine eye] when thy sister came forth and said [to Pharaoh’s people], ‘Shall I guide you unto [a family] that might take charge of him. So, We returned thee unto thy mother, so that her eye might be gladdened, and that she might not sorrow [any longer]. (20:40)

Sister of Moses paid a visit to Pharaoh's daughter and suggested that she knew a family that could rear infant Moses. He was returned to his mother, who nursed him. Pharaoh's daughter paid the child's mother for nursing the baby. Thus, the child became the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and she named him Moses and he was raised in an Egyptian court.

THE WIFE OF PHARAOH IS TRULY DEVOUT

And for those who have attained faith, Allah has propounded a parable in [the story of] Pharaoh's wife as she prayed, "O my Sustainer! Build Thou for me a mansion in paradise with Thee, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from all evil-doing folks!" (66:11)

Grant of paradise to Pharaoh's wife for having faith in God and saving Moses, one of the great prophets of God.

(2) MANSLAUGHTER OF EGYPTIAN AND MOSES FLEEING TO MADYAN

The following incident happened when Moses was an adult, and he killed an Egyptian.

MANSLAUGHTER OF EGYPTIAN AND TRIBAL PARTISANSHIP

[One day] he [Moses] entered the city at a time when [most of] its people were [resting in their houses] unaware of what was going on [in the streets]. He encountered two men fighting—one of his people [Hebrew] and the other of his enemies [Egyptian]. And the one who belonged to his people cried out to him for help against him, who was of his enemies—whereupon Moses struck him down with his fist, and [thus] brought about his end. [But then] he said [to himself]: "This is of Satan's doing! He is an open foe, leading [man] astray!" [And] he prayed: "O my Sustainer! I have

sinned against myself! Grant me, then, Thy forgiveness!” And He (God) forgave him-for He alone is truly forgiving, a dispenser of grace. Said he: “O my Sustainer, [I vow] by all the blessings Thou hast bestowed on me. Nevermore shall I aid those lost in sin!” (28:15-17)

“Nevermore shall I aid those lost in sin” indicates that the Israelite Moses helped was a denier of truth in the moral sense of this definition. The above paragraph suggests that the Israelite, not the Egyptian, was wrong. Moses’ assistance of the Israelite was inherently tribal, without regard to the rights and wrongs of the case. Immediately afterward, he realized he had committed a grave sin. This was not only by inadvertently killing an innocent person, but also by basing his action on mere racial prejudice. This is the purpose of the above Quranic segment of Moses’ story. The Prophet stressed and explained its morals on many occasions, including his famous saying. “He is not of us who proclaims the cause of tribal partisanship, and he is not of us who fights in the cause of tribal partisanship, and he is not of us who dies for the cause of tribal partisanship.” When asked to explain the meaning of “tribal partisanship,” the Prophet answered, “It means helping your people in an unjust cause.”

CONFRONTATION WITH ANOTHER EGYPTIAN THE FOLLOWING DAY

The following day, he found himself in the city, looking fearfully, when lo! The one who had sought his help the day before [once again] cried out to him. [For help against another Egyptian]. Moses said unto him: “You are indeed, most clearly, deeply in the wrong!” But then as soon as he was about to lay violent hands on the man, who was their [common] enemy, the latter exclaimed: “O Moses, do you intend to slay me as you did slay another man yesterday? Your sole aim is to become a tyrant in this land, for

you do not care to be of those who set things to rights!” (28:18-19)

Moses was about to lay violent hands on the Egyptian; he was swayed again by his feeling of kinship with the Israelite.

WARNING FROM THE MAN

And [then and there] a man came running from the farthest end of the city and said: “O Moses! The great ones [of the kingdom] are deliberating your case intending to kill you! Be gone, then: I am of those who wish you well!” So, he went forth looking fearfully about him and prayed: “O my Sustainer! Save me from all evil-doing folks!” And as he turned his face towards Madyan (Midian), he said [to himself]: “It may well be that my Sustainer will [thus] guide me onto the right path.” (28:20-22)

Madyan is the same as Midian of the Bible, a town in the Arabian Peninsula on the Red Sea.

MOSES AT THE WATER WELL

Now, when he arrived at Madyan's wells, he found a large group of men who were watering [their herds and flocks]. At some distance from them, he came across two women who were keeping back their flock. He (Moses) asked [them]: “What is the matter with you?” They answered: “We cannot water [our animals] until the herdsmen drive [theirs] home—for [we are weak and] our father is an old man.” So, he watered [their flock] for them: and when he withdrew to the shade and prayed: “O my Sustainer! In dire need, am I of any good Thou may bestow upon me!” (28:23-24) “And [when thou camest of age], thou didst slay a man: but We did save thee from all grief, although We tried thee with various trials. And then thou didst sojourn for years among the people of Madyan.” (20:40)

In the thirteenth century before Christ, Moses touched on Arab history. After killing an Egyptian, Moses fled to the Midianites, a tribe that migrated from the Arabian Peninsula toward the Dead Sea. The inhabitants of Madyan (called Midian in the Bible) were Arabs of the Amorite group. Since they were racially and culturally related to the Hebrews, they could help Moses in his plight. After arriving in Madyan, Moses was resting at a well when the daughters of the Madyanite priest Jethro came to water their father's flocks. Later, Moses married Zipporah, Jethro's daughter. She bore two sons to Moses, joining Arab and Jewish destinies.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Now, when [Moses] had reached full manhood and had matured mentally. We bestowed upon him the ability to judge [between right and wrong] and [innate] knowledge: for thus We reward good doers. (28:14)

This statement stresses the supreme divine blessing of spiritual consciousness in its most profound significance, combined with rational thought. This is expressed in the concept of the "ability to judge between right and wrong." Moses reached this spiritual maturity after the events described above.

JETHRO'S HIRING OF MOSES

[Shortly] afterwards, one of the two [maidens] approached him, walking shyly, and said: "My father invited you to reward you for having watered [our flock] for us." And as soon as [Moses] told him the story [of his life], he said: "Have no fear! You are now safe from those evil-doing folks!" Said one of the [daughters]: "O my father! Hire him, for the best [man] you could hire is one who is [as] strong and worthy of trust as he!" (28:25-26)

INVITATION TO MARRY JETHRO'S DAUGHTER

[After some time, the father] said: "I am willing to let you wed one of these two daughters of mine on the understanding that you will remain eight years in my service. If you complete ten [years], that would be [an act of grace] from you, for I do not want to impose any hardship on you: [on the contrary], you will find me if Allah so wills, righteous in all my dealings." Answered [Moses]: "Thus shall it be between you and me! Whatever the two terms I fulfill, let there be no ill will against me. And Allah witnesses all that we say!" (28:27-28)

(3) THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

THE BURNING TREE

And when Moses fulfilled his term and wandered with his family [in the desert], he noticed a fire on the mountain slope. [And so] he said to his family: "Wait here." Behold, I perceive a fire [far away]; perhaps I may bring you some tidings, or [at least] a burning brand from the fire, so that you might warm yourselves." But when he came close to it, a call was sounded from the right-side bank of the valley, out of the tree [burning] on the hallowed ground: "O Moses! Verily, I am Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!" (28:29-30) "Blessed are all who are within [reach of] this fire, and all who are near it! And limitless in His glory is Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!" [And Allah spoke thus]: "O Moses! Verily, I alone am Allah, the Almighty, the Wise!" (27:8-9) "Take off, then, thy sandals! Behold, thou art in the twice-hallowed valley, and I have chosen thee [to be My apostle]. Listen, then, to what is being revealed [to thee]." Verily, I - I alone am Allah; there is no deity save Me. Hence, worship Me alone, be constant in prayer, and remember Me! "I have willed to keep it hidden, the Last Hour. It is bound to come, so that everyone is repaid for what he strove for [in life]. Hence, let not anyone who

does not believe in its coming and follows [but] his desires divert thee from [belief in] it, lest thou perish! (20:12-16)

At-tur (the mountain), where God called upon Moses and the fire is synonymous with light, or the illumination God bestows on his prophets because of their inborn spiritual sensitivity. The “tree” referred to is identical to the Bible's burning bush (Exodus 3:2). It is twice holy because Moses heard God's voice and was entrusted with prophethood. Thus, conscious remembrance of God and His oneness and uniqueness is declared the innermost purpose and the intellectual justification of all true prayer. The expression “what he strove for” implies a consciousness of endeavor comprising everything manifested in words or deeds. It excludes involuntary actions and inadvertent omissions irrespective of whether the relevant activity or failure is morally right or wrong. By enunciating the above principle within the context of Moses' story, the Quran stresses the essential identity of ethical concepts underlying all true religions.

MYSTIC COMMUNION

Call to mind, through this divine writ, Moses. He was chosen as an apostle [of God], a prophet. And [remember how] We called upon him from the right-hand slope of the mountain and drew him near [unto Us] in mystic communion. (19:51-52)

STAFF TO SERPENT AND SHINING HAND

“Now, what is this in thy right hand, O Moses?” He answered: “It is my staff; I lean on it, and with it, I beat down leaves for my sheep, and [many] other uses have I for it.” Said He: “Throw it down, O Moses!” (20:17-19) But as soon as [Moses] saw it move swiftly like a snake, he drew back [in terror], and did not [dare to] return. [And God spoke to him again]: “O Moses! Draw near, and have no fear, for thou art are secure. [In this world and the next] “[And now] put thy hand into thy bosom. It will come out

[shining] white, without blemish. And [henceforth] hold thine arm close to thyself, free of all fear. "These, then, shall be the two signs [of thy bearing a message] from thy Sustainer unto Pharaoh and his great ones - for, behold, they are people depraved!" (28:31-32)

Moses' hand became strangely luminescent by his prophethood. The miraculous transformation of the staff into a serpent has mystic significance. The "two signs" may be understood as Moses' ability to remain, under God's omnipresence, forever free of physical or moral fear. Appearance and reality are intrinsically different. Consequently, the spiritual insight bestowed by God on His chosen ones and the ability to show that appearance and reality are not always identical. Since Moses killed an Egyptian, he feared retribution, making his mission impossible.

GIVE THIS MISSION TO AARON

Hence, [remember how it was] when thy Sustainer summoned Moses: "Go unto those evil-doing people, the people of Pharaoh, who refuse to be conscious of Me!" He answered: "O my Sustainer! Behold, I fear they will give me the lie, and then my breast will be straitened, and my tongue will not be free: send, then, [this Thy command] to Aaron. Said He: "Not so, indeed! Go forth, then, both of you, with Our messages: verily, We shall be with you, listening [to your call]! Both of you, go to Pharaoh, and say, 'Behold, we bear a message from the Sustainer of all the worlds, let the children of Israel go!' (26:10-17)

AARON AS A HELPER

Said [Moses]: "O my Sustainer! I have slain one of them, so I fear they will slay me. And my brother Aaron is far better at speech than I am. Send him, therefore, as a helper. So, he will testify [more eloquently] and bear witness to my speaking the truth: for I fear indeed that they will give me the lie." (28:33-34) "O my

Sustainer! Open my heart [to Thy light], and make my task easy for me. Loosen the knots from my tongue so they can fully understand my speech. Appoint for me, out of my kinsfolk, one who will help me bear my burden: Aaron, my brother. Add Thou through him to my strength, and let him share my task, so that [together] we might abundantly extol Thy limitless glory and remember Thee without cease!" Verily, Thou seest all that is within us!" (20:25-35) He said: "We shall strengthen thine arm through thy brother and endow both of you with power so that they will not be able to touch you: by Our messages shall you two, and all who follow you, prevail!" (28:35)

Wazir (helper) is a burden-carrier derived from wizr. Hence its later (post-classical) application to government ministers. Pharaoh's most significant transgressions were his claim to divine status, barbaric anti-Semitic attitude, and genocide of Hebrew males. Now, God commissioned Moses to deliver his people from the bondage. He expressed his doubts regarding his qualifications, especially his ability as a public speaker (see Exodus 4:10, "I am slow of speech and tongue"), which would imply he was not an eloquent speaker. It was Moses' profound humility, who considered himself incapable of fulfilling the task for which he was chosen and asked God to entrust it to Aaron instead. The reference to "a grave charge" meant killing an Egyptian, the cause of his flight.

SINCERE REPENTANCE

[And God spoke to him again]: "O Moses! Fear not for, behold, no fear needs message bearers have in My Presence, and neither need anyone who has done wrong and replaced the wrong with virtue: for, verily, I am much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! "[And thou shalt depart] with nine [of My] messages unto Pharaoh and his people - for, verily, they are depraved!" (27:10-12)

The act of sincere repentance replaced the wrong with virtue. It refers to Moses's slaying of the Egyptian in his youth.

CHOSEN FOR GOD'S SERVICE

Said He: "Thou art granted all that thou hast asked for, O Moses! (20:36) And now thou hast come [here] as ordained [by Me], O Moses: for I have chosen thee for Mine Own service. "Go forth, thou and thy brother, with My messages, and never tire of remembering Me. Go forth, both of you, to Pharaoh: for he has transgressed all the bounds of equity!" (20:40-43)

(4) MOSES AND AARON TO EGYPT TO CONFRONT PHARAOH

After his encounter with God, Moses returned to Jethro and requested to visit his people in Egypt. However, he did not disclose that God commissioned him to free his people. Moses took his sons and wife and returned to Egypt. Aaron and Moses reunited in the wilderness and prepared to meet Pharaoh.

MOSES AND AARON CONTINUED EXPRESSING FEAR

The two [brothers] said: "O our Sustainer! We fear lest he act hastily regarding us or he [continues to] transgress all bounds of equity." Answered He: "Fear not! I shall be with you two, hearing and seeing [all]. Go you two unto him and say, we are apostles sent by thy Sustainer: so, let the children of Israel go with us, and cause them not to suffer [any longer]. We have now come to you with a message from thy Sustainer, and [know that His] peace shall be [only] for those who follow [His] guidance. For it has been revealed to us that [in the life to come] suffering shall befall all who give the lie to the truth and turn away [from it]!" (20:45-48)

GUIDE PHARAOH TO GOD, BUT SPEAK GENTLY

“Go unto Pharaoh - for, verily, he has transgressed all bounds of what is right - and say [to him], ‘Art thou desirous of attaining purity? [If so], then I shall guide thee towards [cognition of] thy Sustainer, so that [henceforth] thou wilt stand in awe [of Him].’” (79:17-19) But gently speak to him, so that he might bethink himself or [at least] be filled with apprehension.” (20:44)

“Guide you towards thy Sustainer” implies that so long as man is not fully aware of God's existence, he cannot discern between what is morally right or wrong. Since God is just, He does not punish anyone who has not yet achieved discernment. See 6:131: “Thy Sustainer would never destroy a community for its misconduct, so long as its people are still unaware of right and wrong.” “So that he might bethink himself” that there is some truth in Moses' words. Since God knows the future, the tentative form in the above phrase does not cast any “doubt” on God’s part regarding Pharaoh’s future reaction. It implies no more than His command to the bearer of His message to address the sinner gently, with a view to the sinner reconsidering his actions. Every Quranic narrative aims to bring out an eternal truth or elucidate a universal principle of human behavior. God’s command to Moses to speak to one sinner “mildly” retains its validity for all times and for all attempts at conversion.

ENCOUNTERS WITH PHARAOH

Pharaoh claimed to be divine, and as a god in human flesh, he was not accustomed to taking orders from lesser gods. This was let alone an unknown like Yahweh, the God of Israel. Thus, the stage was set for a long and epic struggle between the Pharaoh with an oversized ego. This contrasted with a prophet with a new understanding of God and his power.

LET THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL GO

Moses said: “O Pharaoh! I am an apostle from the Sustainer of all the worlds, so constituted I cannot say anything about Allah but the truth. I have now come to you with clear evidence from your Sustainer. so let the children of Israel go with me!” (7:104-105)

PHARAOH REMINDED MOSES OF PAST FAVORS

[Pharaoh] said: “Did we not bring you up among us as a child and did you not spend years of your [later] life? And yet you did commit that [heinous] deed of yours, and [have thus shown] you are one of the ingrates!” Replied [Moses]: “I committed it while I was still drifting astray. I fled from you because I feared you. However, since then, my Sustainer has endowed me with ability to judge. [between right and wrong] and has made me one of [His] message-bearers. And [as for] that favor of which you so tauntingly remind me— [was it not] due to your having enslaved the children of Israel?” (26:18-22)

The interpolation of the word “heinous” is because the construction of the above sentence is meant to express Pharaoh’s utter condemnation of the manslaughter committed by Moses.

WHO IS THE SUSTAINER OF THE WORLDS?

[Pharaoh] said: “Who, now, is this Sustainer of you two, O Moses?” He replied: “Our Sustainer is He who gives unto everything [that exists] its true nature and form, and thereupon guides it [towards its fulfillment].” (20:49-50) “[He is] the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them: if you would, but [allow yourselves to] be convinced!” Said [Pharaoh] to those around him: “Did you hear [what he said]?” [And Moses] continued: “[He is] your Sustainer, [too], as well as the Sustainer of your forefathers of old!” [Pharaoh] exclaimed: “This is your ‘apostle’ who [claims he] has been sent to you is mad

indeed!” [But Moses] went on: “[He of whom I speak is] the Sustainer of the east and the west and of all that is between the two— [as you would know] if you would but use your reason!” (26:24-28)

The term Khalq signifies not only the inner nature of a created thing or being but also the outward form in which this nature manifests itself. Therefore, the composite rendering as “its true nature and form.” God is the Sustainer of all the world by the evidence of His creative will in all that exists. “Did you hear what he said?” is a rhetorical question by Pharaoh, meant to convey astonishment, indignation, or derision.

Pharaoh claimed to be divine, and as a god in human flesh, he was not accustomed to taking orders from lesser gods, let alone an unknown like Yahweh, the God of Israel. Thus, the stage was set for a long and epic struggle between Pharaoh with an oversized ego and a prophet with a new understanding of God and his power.

WHAT ABOUT THE PAST GENERATIONS?

Said [Pharaoh], “And what of all the past generations?” [Moses] answered: “The knowledge of all these generations rests with my Sustainer [alone and is laid down] in His decree; my Sustainer does not err, and neither does He forget.” (20:51-52)

Pharaoh inquired of the past generation, who worshiped a plurality of deities. Are they, in your view, irretrievably doomed? Moses replied that God alone decrees their destiny in the life to come. He alone knows their motives and understands the cause of their errors. He alone can appreciate their spiritual merits and demerits. In other words, all idol worshippers will not arbitrarily be sent to hell, and they will be judged according to their deeds.

DISPLAY YOUR SIGNS OF PROPHETHOOD

Said [Pharaoh]: “If you have come with a sign, produce it—if you are a man of truth!” Moses threw down his staff and lo! It was a serpent, plainly visible, and he drew back his hand, and lo! It appeared [shining] white to the beholder. (7:106-108)

Moses' hand was shining white, without blemish, i.e., endowed with transcendent luminosity as a token of his prophethood—and not, as stated in the Bible, “Leprous as snow” (Exodus 4:6).

NINE CLEAR MESSAGES AND MIRACULOUS SIGNS

And indeed, We gave Moses nine clear messages. Ask, then, the children of Israel (of the present time) [to tell you what happened] when he came unto them, [and appealed to the Pharaoh] and the Pharaoh said unto him, “O Moses, I believe you are full of sorcery!” Answered [Moses]: “You know well that none, but the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth has bestowed these [miraculous signs] from on high, as a means of insight [for you]. And O Pharaoh [since you have chosen to reject them], I think you are utterly lost!” (17:101-102)

Nine clear messages may reference nine specific commandments or ethical principles, the foremost being stressing God's oneness and uniqueness. However, the number “nine” may be no more than a metonym for “several,” just as “seven” and “seventy” are often used in classical Arabic to denote “several” or “many.” The following phrase has this meaning: Ask the children of Israel of the present time what the Quran tells us in this respect, and they will be bound to confirm it based on their scriptures.

SORCERY

Pharaoh and his great ones gloried in their arrogance, for they were people lost in sin. And so, when the truth came to them from Us, they said, “This is nothing but sorcery!” Said Moses: “Do you

Speak thus of the truth after it has been brought to you? Can this be sorcery? But sorcerers can never have happy endings!" (10:75-77)

YOU TWO WANT TO BECOME SUPREME

[The great ones] replied: "Have you come to turn us away from what our forefathers believed in and do so that the two of you might become supreme in this land? However, we do not believe in you two!" (10:78) But when Our light-giving messages came unto them, they said, "This is clearly [but] spellbinding deception!" They rejected them in their wickedness and self-exaltation, although their minds were convinced of their truth. (27:13-14).

"Nothing but sorcery" is the accusation that refers to the spellbinding force of Moses' messages, similar to the objections raised against the Last Prophet, Muhammad. Moses' reply implies that sorcery cannot achieve more than temporary phenomena lacking spiritual content. It can never prevail against nature's laws, described in the Quran as "the way of God."

I AM YOUR LORD SUPREME

But when Moses came unto them with Our clear messages [Pharaoh and his great ones] said: "All this is nothing, but spellbinding eloquence devised [by man]. And never did we hear [the like of] this, [nor has it ever been heard of] in the time of our forebears of old!" And Moses replied: "My Sustainer knows best who comes with guidance from Him, and to whom the future belongs! At no time evildoers attain a blessed state!" Said Pharaoh: "O you nobles! I did not realize that you could have any deity other than me." (28:36-38) And Pharaoh issued a call to his people, saying: "O my people! Does not the dominion over Egypt belong to me since all these running waters flow at my feet? Can you not, then, know [that I am your Lord supreme]? Am I not

better than this contemptible man who can hardly make his meaning clear? And then why have no golden armlets been bestowed on him? Or why have no angels come together with him?" Thus, he incited his people to levity, and they obeyed him: for they were people depraved! (43:51-54)

Since Pharaoh considered himself, God incarnate, a challenge to his divinity implied a challenge to the prevalent religious system. "To whom the future belongs" refers to a happy ending in the present as well as the afterlife. "Running waters flow at my command": a reference to the imposing irrigation system originating in the Nile and controlled by royal power. "Who can hardly make his meaning clear?" refers to the speech impediment Moses suffered or perhaps to the contents of his message, which to Pharaoh seemed unconvincing. In ancient Egypt, golden armlets and necklaces were regarded as royal insignia (Genesis 41:42) or as evidence of high social dignity.

PHARAOH REJECTED ALL GUIDANCE

Thereupon he (Moses) [went to Pharaoh and] made him aware of the great wonders [of God's grace]. But [Pharaoh] gave him the lie and rebelliously rejected [all the guidance] and brusquely turned his back [on Moses]. He gathered [his great ones], and called [to his people], and said, "I am your Lord All-Highest!" (79:20-24) Indeed, if you choose to worship any deity other than me, I shall throw you into prison!" (26:29-30)

Lit., "showed him the great wonder," i.e., of God's guidance, and in His measureless grace, offers even to the most stubborn sinner. Pharaoh's claim to divine status was the cardinal sin, whereby "he has transgressed all bounds of what is right."

TWO MORTALS LIKE US

Pharaoh and his great ones behaved with arrogance, for they wanted to glorify [only] themselves. And so, they said: “Shall we believe [them] two mortals like us, even though their people are our slaves?” Thus, they gave the lie to those two and earned [thereby] their place among the doomed. For indeed, We vouchsafed revelation to Moses so they could find the right way. (23:46-50) O you apostles! “Partake of the good things of life and do righteous deeds: I have full knowledge of all that you do.” (23:51)

“O, you apostles! Partake of the good things of life” is meant to stress the humanness and mortality of all God’s apostles. It is also meant to refute the unbelievers’ argument that God could not have chosen “a mortal like ourselves” to be His message-bearer. These arguments overlook the fact that only human beings who “partake of the good things of life” can understand the needs and motives of their fellow men. They can also guide them in their spiritual and social concerns.

PHARAOH’S DEMAND TO ERECT A LOFTY TOWER

[Pharaoh said]: “Well, then, O Haman, kindle me a fire for [baking bricks of] clay, and build me a lofty tower, that perhaps I may look at the God of Moses. Although, I am convinced he is of those who [always] tell lies!” Thus, arrogantly, without the least good sense, did he and his hosts behave on Earth— as if they thought they would never have to appear before Us [for judgment]! (28:38-39)

Pharaoh’s demand for a lofty tower alludes to building one of the great pyramids. It is also a contemptuous reference to Moses’ concept of God as a transcendent power, inconceivably high above all that exists. Ancient Egyptians believed in life after death, including divine judgment. The Pharaoh Moses confronted behaved

arrogantly, contrary to all good sense. The Quran, by implication, likens his attitude to a person who does not believe in the resurrection and man's ultimate responsibility before God. Thus, the above reference is that "they thought they would never have to appear before Us."

(5) ANONYMOUS BELIEVER FROM THE PHARAOH'S FAMILY

Although Egyptians, by and large, either by choice or under Pharaoh's threats, rejected Moses' message, there was one member of Pharaoh's family who had a change of heart. The Quran does not reveal his identity. The following is this man's testimony.

LEAVE IT TO ME TO SLAY MOSES

Thus, indeed, We did send Moses with Our messages and a manifest authority [from Us] unto Pharaoh, Haman, and Qarun; but they [only] said, "A spellbinder is he, a liar!" Now [as for Pharaoh and his followers], when he came to them, setting forth the truth from Us, they said, "Slay the sons of those who share his beliefs, and spare [only] their women!" – but the guile of those deniers of the truth could not lead to aught but failure. And Pharaoh said: "Leave it to me to slay Moses – and let him invoke his [alleged] Sustainer! Behold, I fear lest he cause you to change your religion or lest he cause corruption to prevail in the land!" But Moses said: "With [Him who is] my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer, have I indeed found refuge from everyone who, immersed in false pride, will not believe in [the coming of] the Day of Reckoning!" (40:23-27)

WOULD YOU KILL A BELIEVER?

At that, a believing man of Pharaoh's family, who [until then] had concealed his faith, exclaimed: "Would you slay a man because he says, 'Allah is my Sustainer'-seeing, that he has brought you

all evidence of this truth from your Sustainer? Now, if he is a liar, his lie will fall back on him; but if he is a man of truth, something [of the punishment] of which he warns you is bound to befall you, for Allah would not grace with His guidance, one who has wasted his self by lying [about Him]. O my people! Yours is the dominion today, [and] most eminent are you on Earth: but who will rescue us from Allah's punishment, once it befalls us?" Said Pharaoh: "I but want to make you see what I see myself. I would never make you follow any path except that of rectitude!" (40:28-29)

Thus, the anonymous believer spoken of here argues that the message brought by Moses is so convincing that it is proof of his not being "one who wastes his self" or destroys himself spiritually—by a spurious claim to divine inspiration.

THE FATE OF THE EVILDOERS OF OLD

He who attained faith exclaimed: "O my people! I fear for you the like of what one Day befell people who were leagued together [against God's truth]. Like what happened to Noah's people, [including the tribes of] Ad and Thamud, and those who came after them! Likewise, Allah does not want His creatures to suffer harm. And O my people, I fear for you [coming of] that Day of [the Judgment], the Day when you will] call one another [in distress]. The Day when you will [wish to] turn your backs and flee, having none to defend you against Allah: for he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide." (40:30-33).

God does not wish wrong for His creatures. What happened to sinners in this world, they deserve. The following two verses refer to the Day of Judgment.

REJECTING JOSEPH'S PROPHETHOOD

(The anonymous believer continued): *"[Remember]: it was to you that Joseph came in the past with all evidence of the truth, but you*

never ceased to doubt all [the messages] he brought you. So much so that when he died, you said, never will Allah send any apostles [ever] after him! In this way, Allah lets go astray, those who waste their selves by throwing suspicion [on His revelations]. They call Allah's messages in question without evidence, [a sin] exceedingly loathsome in the sight of Allah and of those who have attained faith. It is in this way that Allah seals every arrogant, self-exalting heart.” (40:34-35)

Joseph was only recognized as a prophet by the ruling class. The Hyksos, of Arab origin, spoke a language closely related to Hebrew and were, therefore, emotionally and culturally predisposed toward Joseph's mission. The rest of the population was and remained hostile to his faith. Thus, the Egyptians refused to acknowledge Joseph's prophethood and denied God sent any prophets in the first place. They rejected God's message without coherent evidence to support their revelation denial.

I SUMMON YOU TO SALVATION

Still, the man who attained faith continued: “O my people! Follow me: I shall guide you to the path of rectitude! This worldly life is a brief enjoyment, whereas the life to come is home-abiding. [There] anyone who has done an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof. While anyone, be it man or woman, who has done righteous deeds and is a believer as well—all such will enter Paradise, wherein they shall be blessed with goodness beyond all reckoning!” (40:38-40)

YOU SUMMON ME TO FIRE

[The anonymous believer continued]: “O my people, how is it that I summon you to salvation, while you invite me to fire? [For] you call upon me to deny [the oneness of] Allah and to ascribe a share in His divinity which I cannot [possibly] have any knowledge. While I summon you to [the cognition of] the Almighty, the All-

Forgiving, there is no doubt you summon me to is something that has no claim to being invoked either in this world or in the life to come. [There is no doubt] unto Allah is our return. They who have wasted themselves shall find themselves in the fire: and at that time, you will [have cause to] remember what I am telling you [now]. But [as for me], I commit myself to Allah. For Allah knows all that is in [the hearts of] His servants.” And Allah preserved him from the evil of their scheming. (40:41-45)

CALL TO EGYPTIANS TO ACCEPT DIVINE MESSAGE

Indeed, [long] before their time, We tried Pharaoh’s people [in the same way]: for there came a noble apostle, [who said]: “Give in unto me, O Allah’s bondmen! I am an apostle [sent] to you! And exalt yourselves not against Allah: for I come unto you with manifest authority [from Him]. It is with my Sustainer—and your Sustainer—I seek refuge against all your attempts to revile me. And if you do not believe me, [at least] stand away from me!” (44:17-21)

The phrase “give in to me, God’s bondmen” can be understood in two senses. (1) It may imply a call to the Egyptians (since all human beings are “God’s bondmen”) to accept the divine message Moses was about to convey to them. (2) Alternatively, “Give up to me God’s servants,” i.e., the children of Israel, who were kept in slavery in Egypt.” Either of these two interpretations is legitimate. “Attempts to revile me” or lest you throw stones at me—this expression is used in the physical sense of throwing stones, as well as metaphorically, in the sense of “throwing aspersions” or reviling.

INSUFFICIENT FAITH AMONG EGYPTIANS

But none save a few of his people declared their faith in Moses, [while others held back] for fear of Pharaoh and their great ones, lest they persecute them: for Pharaoh was mighty on Earth and given to excesses. (10:83)

Since the Quran mentions that some Egyptians believed in Moses' message and openly proclaimed their belief, they became "his people," besides the Israelites. The reference strengthens this assumption in the following clause of this sentence to an expression relating to the Egyptian "great ones." The sequence shows that not the belief, but its open profession is referred to here. Due to fear, most Egyptians did not declare their faith openly.

(6) CONTEST BETWEEN MOSES AND SORCERERS OF EGYPT

Pharaoh (a title borne by every indigenous ruler of Egypt) was an aged king and the embodiment of the Egyptian religion. Egyptians were duty-bound to accept the official religion as an integral part of their life. Occult practices and magic played a leading role.

SUMMONING OF EGYPT SORCERER

The great ones among Pharaoh's people said: "This is indeed a sorcerer of considerable knowledge, who wants to drive you out of your land!" [Said Pharaoh]: "What, then, do you advise?" They answered: "Let him and his brother (Aaron) wait awhile and send to all cities heralds who shall bring before you every sorcerer of great knowledge." (7:109-112)

Pharaoh summoned all the greatest sorcerers of Egypt to decide upon his artful scheme. The contest was to be held on the day of the festival or the day of adornment, which was Egyptian New Year's Day. The sorcerers were priests of the official Amon cult, where magic played a significant role. Thus, their victory over Moses would vindicate the state religion.

PHARAOH'S CHALLENGE TO MOSES

Indeed, We made Pharaoh aware of all Our messages—but he gave them the lie and refused to heed [them]. He said: "Have you

come to drive us out of our land by your sorcery, O Moses? If so, we shall produce before you the like thereof! Appoint, then, a date between you and us—which we shall not fail to keep, nor [may] you—at a suitable place!” Answered [Moses]: “Your appointment shall be the day of the Festival, and let the people assemble when the sun is raised high.” Pharaoh withdrew [with his counselors] and decided upon the scheme he would pursue before coming to the meeting. (20:56-60)

Moses said to them: “Woe to you! Do not invent lies against Allah [by deliberately denying the truth of His messages] lest He afflict you with the most grievous suffering: for He who contrives [such] a lie is already undone!” So, they debated among themselves what to do. They kept their counsel secret, saying [to one another]: “These two are surely sorcerers, intent on driving you from your land by their sorcery and doing away with your time-honored way of life. Hence, [O sorcerers of Egypt] decide upon the scheme which you will pursue, and then come forward in one body: for he who prevails today shall prosper indeed!” (20:61-64) And all the sorcerers came unto Pharaoh [and] said: “We ought to have a great reward if it is we who prevail.” Answered [Pharaoh]: “Yes, and you shall be among those near me.” (7:113-114)

SORCERERS DECLARED PREMATURE VICTORY

So, the sorcerers were assembled at a set time on a specific day, and the people were asked. “Are you all present so that we could follow [in the footsteps of] the sorcerers if they prevail?” (26:38-40) They [sorcerers] said: “O Moses! Either you shall throw [your staff], or we shall [be the first to] throw.” He replied: “You throw [first].” And when they threw down [their staffs], they cast a spell upon the people’s eyes, struck them with awe, and produced mighty sorcery. (7:115-116) Sorcerers said: “By Pharaoh’s might it is we indeed who have prevailed!” (26:44)

MOSES' STAFF SWALLOWED THEIR DECEPTION

Moses felt apprehensive in his heart. [But] We said: "Fear not! It is you who prevail! And [now] throw that [staff] in your right hand—it shall swallow up all that they have wrought; [for] they have wrought only a sorcerer's trickery, and the sorcerer can never come to any good, whatever he may aim at!" (20:67-69) And lo? It swallowed up all their deceptions: the truth was established and proved all they had done in vain. And they were vanquished there and then and were utterly humiliated. (7:117-119) Moses said to them: "What you have contrived is [but] sorcery which Allah will bring to void! Allah does not further the works of spreaders of corruption, whereas, by His words, Allah proves the truth to be true, however hateful this may be to those who are lost in sin!" (10:81-82)

The sorcerers' feat was based on mass hallucination, to which even Moses succumbed for a while. "Sorcerers can never come to any good," irrespective of whether he aims at a good or an evil end, is an unconditional condemnation of all endeavors that fall under magic. "Swallowed up all their deceptions" implies that Moses' act was a genuine miracle, while the sorcerers were make-believe. By "God's words," it meant His creative will, manifested in the laws of nature instituted by Him, as well as in the revelations granted by Him to His prophets.

SORCERERS' CHANGE OF HEART

And the sorcerers fell, prostrating themselves [and] exclaiming: "We have come to believe in the Sustainer of all the worlds, the Sustainer of Moses and Aaron!" Said Pharaoh: "Have you decided to believe in him (Moses) before I permitted you? This is indeed a plot you have cunningly devised in this [my] city to drive out its people! But in time, you shall know [my revenge]. Most certainly shall I cut off your hands and your feet in great numbers because of [your] perverseness, and then I shall crucify you in

great numbers, all together! (7:120-124) [I shall do this] so that you might know for certain as to which of us [two] [I or the Allah in whom you now believe] can inflict a severe chastisement, and [which] is the more abiding?" (20:71)

Sorcerers fell to the ground as if thrown by a superior force. The phrases “most certainly shall I cut off your hands and feet in great numbers” and “crucify you” indicate that either the repentant sorcerers thus addressed were many or that they had a considerable following among Egyptians. The Biblical reference corroborates the latter assumption that many Egyptians joined the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt: “And a mixed multitude joined them” (Exodus 12:38).

REPLY OF EX-SORCERERS TO PHARAOH

They answered: “Verily, unto our Sustainer do we turn - for thou takest vengeance on us only because we believe in our Sustainer’s messages as soon as they came to us. O our Sustainer! Shower us with patience in adversity and make us die as men who surrender themselves unto Thee!” (7:125-126)

HOPING FOR FORGIVENESS OF SINS

[Ex-sorcerers continued] “Never shall we prefer you to all the evidence of truth that has come to us, nor to Him who has brought us into being! Go ahead and decree, then, whatever you are going to decree. You can decree only [something pertains to] this worldly life! As for us, we have come to believe in our Sustainer, [hoping] that He may forgive us, our faults and all that magic onto which you have forced us: for Allah is the best [to look forward to], and the One who is truly abiding [i.e., eternal]. (20:72-73) “No harm [can you do to us]: unto our Sustainer do we turn! We [but] ardently desire our Sustainer to forgive us our faults in return for us being the foremost among believers!”(26:50-51)

CONSEQUENCES IN THE AFTERLIFE

[Ex-sorcerers continued]: “As for him who shall appear before his Sustainer [on Judgment Day] lost in sin—his [portion] shall be Hell. He will neither die nor live. Whereas he who shall appear before Him as a believer who has done righteous deeds—it is such that shall have lofty stations [in the life to come]. Gardens of perpetual bliss, through which running waters flow, therein to abide for that shall be the recompense of all who attain to purity.” (20:74-76)

INCREASED PERSECUTION OF JEWS

The great ones among Pharaoh’s people said: “Will you allow Moses and his people to spread corruption on Earth, and to [cause your people to] forsake thee and thy gods?” [Pharaoh] replied: “We shall slay their sons in vast numbers and shall spare [only] their women: for, we hold sway over them!” Moses said to his people: “Turn unto Allah for aid and have patience in adversity. All the earth belongs to Allah. He gives it as a heritage as He wills of His servants, and the future belongs to the God-conscious!” [But the children of Israel] said: “We had suffered before you came to us, and since you have come to us!” [Moses] replied: “It may well be that your Sustainer will destroy your foe and make you inherit the earth: and thereupon He will behold how you act.” (7:127-129)

After the initial encounter with Moses, Pharaoh increased the oppression of the Hebrews by the diabolical plan of requiring them to gather straw binders for the bricks. He also required them to produce the same quota each day. Some Hebrews rebuffed Moses. God's promise allayed Moses' doubts about acting against Pharaoh. The children of Israel have displayed patience in adversity. The hope held out by Moses helped them to overcome their doubts. His words “God will behold how you act”—He will judge you by your actions—imply a clear warning.

TURN YOUR HOUSES INTO PLACES OF WORSHIP

Moses said: “O my people! If you believe in Allah, place your trust in Him—if you have [truly] surrendered yourselves unto Him!” They answered: “In Allah have we placed our trust! O our Sustainer, make us not a plaything [or temptation to evil] for the evildoing folk, and save us, by Thy grace, from people who deny the truth!” [Thus] did We inspire Moses and his brother: “Set aside for your people some houses in the city, and [tell them], to turn your houses into places of worship, and be constant in prayer! And give you [O Moses] the glad tidings [of Allah’s succor] to all believers.” (10:84-87)

“Turn your houses into a place of worship,” lit., “a direction of prayer” (Qiblah). This is a metaphor meant to impress the children of Israel that their only salvation lies in God-consciousness and unceasing devotion to Him.

MOSES’ PRAYER FOR PHARAOH'S DESTRUCTION

Moses prayed: “O our Sustainer! Splendor and riches, Thou have vouchsafed, in the life of this world, to Pharaoh and his great ones—with the result that they lead [others] astray from Thy path! O our Sustainer! Wipe out their riches, and harden their hearts, so that they may not attain to faith before they see the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!” [Allah] answered: “Accepted is this your prayer! Continue, then, both of you, steadfastly on the right way, and do not follow the path of those who have no knowledge [of right and wrong].” (10:88-89)

AFFLICTIONS OF NATURAL DISASTERS UPON EGYPTIANS

And with Pharaoh of [many] tent-poles? [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands and brought about grand corruption therein. Therefore, thy Sustainer let loose

upon them a scourge of suffering: for thy Sustainer is ever on His watch! (89:10-14)

According to the Bible, God sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh again and again with the same message: “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go.’” Each time Pharaoh refused, God punished the Egyptians with escalating natural disasters such as blood in the Nile, frogs, lice, flies, cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. After nine rounds with Pharaoh, he was shaken when death took his son and ordered the Hebrews to leave. The Quran does not mention the Pharaoh's son's death. It would be unjust to kill an innocent child for his father's sins. The Pharaoh was guilty of the same sin of killing Hebrew male children.

DROUGHT AND SCARCITY OF FRUITS

Most certainly, We overwhelmed Pharaoh’s people with drought and fruit scarcity so that they could take it to heart. But whenever good fortune descended upon them, they would say, “This is [but] our due,” and whenever affliction befell them, they would blame their evil fortune on Moses and those who followed him. Oh, their [evil] fortune was decreed by Allah, but most knew it not. (7:130-131)

FLOODS, LOCUST, LICE, FROGS, AND WATER TURNING INTO THE BLOOD

They [Pharaoh’s people] said [unto Moses]: “Whatever signs you may produce before us to cast a spell upon us; thereby, we shall not believe you!” Thereupon, we let loose upon them floods, and [plagues of] locusts, lice, frogs, and [water turning into] blood—distinct signs [all]: but they gloried in their arrogance, for they were people lost in sin. And whenever a plague struck them, they would cry: “O Moses, pray for us to thy Sustainer on the strength of the covenant [of prophethood] He has made with you! If you remove this plague from us, we will truly believe in you and let the

children of Israel go with you." But whenever We removed the plague from them (the people of Pharaoh), giving them time to fulfill their promise, they broke their word. Although each sign We showed them was weightier than the preceding one: and [each time], We took them to task through suffering, so that they might return [to Us]. And [every time], they exclaimed: "O you sorcerer [mocking Moses]. Pray for us to thy Sustainer on the strength of the covenant [of the prophethood] He has made with you: for, we shall now follow the right way!" But whenever We removed the suffering from them, lo! They would break their word. (7:132-135)

The concept of "returning" to God implies that the intuitive ability to perceive His existence is inherent in human nature. In contrast, "turning away" from God is only a consequence of spiritual degeneration, not an original tendency or predisposition. The "suffering" mentioned above relates to the plagues that struck the rebellious Egyptians.

(7) EXODUS OF ISRAELITES FROM EGYPT

PHARAOH'S DEFENSE FOR ENSLAVING JEWS

And [there came a time when] We inspired Moses thus: "Go forth with My servants by night: for, behold, you will be pursued!" Pharaoh sent heralds to all cities, [bidding them call out his troops and proclaim:] "These [children of Israel] are but a contemptible band; indeed, filled with hatred of us realizing that we are a nation united, fully prepared against any danger. So, we have [rightly] driven them out of [their] gardens and springs, and [deprived them of their erstwhile] station of honor!" (26:52-58)

After Joseph, the Children of Israel enjoyed prosperity and an honorable state for a few generations. Then, the Egyptian dynasty dispossessed them of their wealth and reduced them to bondage, and

Moses was to free them. Pharaoh sought to justify his persecution of the Israelites by emphasizing their dislike (actual or alleged) of the Egyptians. Thus, the Quran illustrates the psychological truth that a dominant nation cannot understand the desire for liberty of the group it oppresses. Therefore, they attribute their rebelliousness to their unreasonable hatred and blind envy of the strong. Finally, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrews to leave but later sent heralds to all cities to gather his troops and pursue the Hebrews. The Egyptian army cornered them at sea, blocking their exit to the east.

THE PARTING OF THE SEA

And so, [The Egyptians] caught up with them at sunrise; and as soon as the two hosts came into sight, Moses' followers exclaimed: "We shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!" He (Moses) replied: "No, indeed! My Sustainer is with me, [and] He will guide me!" We inspired Moses thus: "Strike the sea with your staff!" After that, it parted, and each part appeared like a vast mountain. And We caused the pursuers to draw near to that place: and We saved Moses and all who were with him, and then We caused the others to drown. (26:60-66) Indeed, [a time came when] We thus inspired Moses: "Go forth with My servants by night and strike out for them a dry path through the sea; [and] fear not of being overtaken, and dread not [the sea]." (20:77) They were overwhelmed by the sea, destined to overcome them because Pharaoh had led his people astray and had not guided [them] aright. And Allah took him to the task, [and made him] a warning example in the life to come and in this world. In this, behold, there is a lesson indeed for all who stand in awe [of Allah]. (79:25-26)

According to the Biblical account (Exodus 14:21), "the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all night, and the waters were divided." The phrase "destined to overwhelm them" is meant to express the inevitability of doom that encompassed Pharaoh's army.

VAIN REPENTANCE OF PHARAOH AT HIS LAST HOUR

When he was about to drown, [Pharaoh] exclaimed: “I have come to believe there is no deity save Him in whom the children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender themselves unto Him!” [Allah said]: “Whenever before this you have rebelled [against Us] and have been among those who spread corruption. But today, We shall save only your body so that you may be a [warning] sign to those who will come after you: for many people are heedless of Our messages!” (10:90-92)

At his dying hour, it is too late for the Pharaoh to repent (see 4:18: “Repentance shall not be accepted from those who do evil deeds until their final hour, and then say, behold, now I repent”). “Today, We shall save only your body,” an allusion to the ancient Egyptian custom of embalming kings and nobles and preserving them for posterity.

EXAMPLE OF PHARAOH’S PEOPLE

[To those sinners shall happen] the like of what happened to Pharaoh’s people and those who lived before them. They gave the lie to their Sustainer’s messages, and so We destroyed them in return for their sins and caused Pharaoh’s people to drown: for they were evildoers to all. The vilest creatures in Allah’s sight are those bent on denying the truth and do not believe. (8:54-55)

The last sentence of the paragraph states that belief in any ethical proposition depends on one’s readiness to consider it on its merits. It also requires one to admit the truth of whatever one’s mind judges to conform to other empirically or intuitively established facts.

PHARAOH ARCHETYPES OF EVIL

We seized him [Pharaoh] and his hosts and cast them into the sea. What happened in the end to those evildoers: [We destroyed

them], and We set them up as archetypes [of evil] that show the way to the fire [of Hell]; and [where] no succor will come to them on Resurrection Day. We have also caused a curse to follow them in this world, and on Resurrection Day, they will find themselves among those who are bereft of all good. (28:40-42) [So, they perished: and] how many gardens did they leave behind, and water-runnels, fields of grain, noble dwellings, and [all that] life of ease in which they used to delight! Thus, it was, and [then] We made other people heirs [to what they had left], and neither the sky nor earth shed tears over them, nor were they allowed a respite. (44:25-29) And there was Pharaoh too, and [many of] those who lived before him, and the cities were overthrown. [All of them] indulged in sin upon sin [e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah] and rebelled against their Sustainer's apostles. So, He took them to task with a punishing grasp exceedingly severe! (69:9-10)

The reference to Pharaoh as an “archetype of evil” points to the fact that false pride and arrogance are “satanic” attitudes of mind, repeatedly exemplified in the Quran by Satan’s symbolic “revolt” against God (see 2:34 and 15:41). These are intrinsically sinful, and diabolical impulses lead to evil actions and weaken or destroy man’s spiritual potential. This, in turn, will cause suffering in the hereafter. The term “curse” denotes estrangement from all good and desirable. Those who, by their actions, remove themselves from God’s grace. The curse to follow them in this world is the pejorative connotation universally given to the adjective “Pharaonic.”

SUFFERINGS IN THE HEREAFTER

Vile suffering encompassed Pharaoh's folk. Fire [of the hereafter—that fire], which they were made to contemplate [in vain], morning and evening. On the Day when the Last Hour dawns [Allah will say], “Make Pharaoh's folks enter upon suffering the most severe!” (40:45-46)

OBEDIENCE TO IMMORAL LEADERSHIP

Indeed, We sent Moses with Our message and manifest authority [from Us] unto Pharaoh and his great ones. But they followed Pharaoh's bidding-and his bidding led nowhere to what is right. [And so] he shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, directing them [in this world] towards fire. (in the life to come) Vile was the destination towards which they led—realizing they were pursued by [Allah's] rejection in this [world], and [shall be finally overtaken by it] on the Day of Resurrection; [and] vile was the gift which they were given! (11:96-99)

The main point of this passage is the problem of immoral leadership and, arising from it, man's individual and moral responsibility for wrongs committed in obedience to a "higher authority." The Quran answers this question emphatically in the affirmative: The leader and the led are equally guilty. He cannot be absolved of responsibility on the basis that he blindly followed orders from above.

(8) BACK TO THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD FOR THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

Finally, Moses brought his people to "the mountain of God," where Yahweh first appeared under the burning tree.

Consider the Mountain! Consider [Allah's] revelation, inscribed on wide-open scrolls.

Consider the long-enduring house [of worship]! Consider the vault [of heaven] raised high! Consider the surf-swollen sea! (52:1-6)

The expression at-tur (lit., "the mountain") is used in the Quran exclusively to denote the mountain upon which Moses received his decisive revelation. "The long-enduring house of worship" is a metonym for the continuous, direct revelation granted to His

prophets to come closer to Him through worship. Consider the immensity and wonderful configuration (vault of heaven) of the visible universe as evidence of a conscious Creator.

LEADING ISRAELITES TO FREEDOM

[Thus], indeed, We have sent Moses with Our messages [and with this Our command]. “Lead your people out of the depths of darkness into the light and remind them of the Days of Allah!” In this [reminder], there are messages for all who are wholly patient in adversity and deeply grateful [to Allah]. And, lo Moses spoke unto his people: “Remember the blessings Allah bestowed upon you when He saved you from Pharaoh’s people. They afflicted you with cruel suffering and slaughtered your sons and spared [only] your women, which was an awesome trial from your Sustainer. And [remember the time] when your Sustainer made [this promise] known: ‘if you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly give you more and more; but if you are ungrateful, My chastisement will be severe indeed!’” And Moses added: “If you should [ever] deny the truth—you and whoever else lives on Earth, all of you— [know that] Allah is self-sufficient, always to be praised!” (14:5-8)

The plural form (the Days of God) reveals that the “Day” of which the Quran so often speaks has nothing to do with human time definitions but rather alludes to an ultimate reality in which time has neither place nor meaning.

MANNA AND SALWA

We repeatedly sent down Manna and Quails unto you, [saying], “Partake of the good things We have provided for you as sustenance. But do not transgress the bounds of equity lest My condemnation fall upon you: for, he upon whom My condemnation falls has indeed thrown himself into utter ruin!” Yet withal, I forgive all sins to anyone who repents and attains

faith and does righteous deeds, and after that, keeps to the right path. (20:80-82) And We caused the clouds to comfort you with their shade and sent down manna and quails. [saying], “Partake of the good things We have provided for you as sustenance.” (2:57)

Scholars contest the route of the Hebrews, but the likely possibility is the southern route to Jabal Musa, the Mountain of God. The journey there traversed a desolate country, and Moses had to contend with bitter complaints about water and food scarcity. God provided the Israelites with water, heavenly bread (manna), and quail during this arduous journey.

The Quran refers to God’s bestowal of “manna (mann) and quails (salwa)” upon the Israelites during their wanderings in the Sinai Desert after their exodus from Egypt.

The term manna refers to the sweet, resinous substance exuded by certain plants of the desert. It also denotes everything that is “bestowed as a favor,” i.e., without any effort on the part of the recipient. The term Salwa signifies not merely “quails,” but also “all that makes man content and happy after privation.” Hence, the combination of these two terms denotes, metonymically, the gift of sustenance freely bestowed by God upon Moses' followers.

"Do not transgress the bounds of equity" by behaving in an overweening manner and attribute these favors to your own supposed excellence. God’s condemnation or wrath is a metonym for the inescapable retribution man brings upon himself if he deliberately rejects God’s guidance and transgresses the bounds of equity.

TWELVE SPRINGS

We divided them into twelve tribes, [or] communities. And when the people asked Moses for water, We inspired him, “Strike the

rock with your staff!” Twelve springs gushed forth from it so that all the people knew when to drink. (7:160)

DEMAND FOR FOOD THAT GROWS FROM EARTH

[Remember] when you said: “O Moses, indeed we cannot endure but one type of food; pray, then, to thy Sustainer. He brings forth for us what grows from the earth, its herbs, cucumbers, garlic, lentils, and onions.” Said [Moses], “Would you take a lesser thing in exchange for something that is [even] better? Go back in shame to Egypt, and then you can have what you are asking for!” (2:61)

Or would you exchange your freedom for the little comforts you enjoyed in your Egyptian captivity? During their wanderings in the desert of Sinai, many Jews looked back with longing for the relative security of their lives in Egypt (Numbers 11).

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

God’s promise, first articulated in his unconditional covenant with Abraham established the Jews as his chosen people. Building on Abraham's covenant was the Sinai covenant, also called the Mosaic covenant. It is a conditional agreement between God and the people of Israel that takes place at Mount Sinai. God had a claim on the Hebrews because He had delivered them from Egypt. The only proper response to His love and care is obedience to His will. The Sinai covenant affirms the Israelites as His people if they accept certain rules of conduct. The terms of the covenant start with the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue.

COVENANT CEREMONY

Moses brought his people out of the camp to the foot of the Mountain of God. The whole mountain was wrapped in smoke and trembled greatly from God's presence. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder and summoned Moses to the top of the

Mountain. The Ten Commandments were the stipulations in the covenant ceremony. The following summarizes the Ten Commandments:

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other God before me.
- 2 You shall not make a graven image.
- 3 You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.
- 4 Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy.
- 5 Honor your father and mother.
- 6 You shall not kill.
- 7 You shall not commit adultery.
- 8 You shall not steal.
- 9 You shall not bear false witness.
- 10 You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

The covenant is completed, and God and the people of Israel enter into their contractual relationship. The Ten Commandments follow Quranic teachings. The first four commandments deal with duties we owe to God (Huquq Ullah), and the rest of the ten commandments are concerned with duties we owe to fellow man. (Huququl Ibad).

DIVINE REVELATIONS ON THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD

Consider [Allah's] revelation, inscribed on wide-open scrolls. Consider the long-lasting House of Worship! Consider the Mountain (of Allah)! (52:1-4) O children of Israel! [Thus] We

saved you from your enemy, and [then] We made a covenant with you on the right-hand slope of The Mountain. (20:80)

Wide-open scrolls, always open to understanding. The long-enduring house of worship is a metaphor for a man who has persistently, although often but dimly, realized God's existence ever since the dawn of human consciousness. Spurred by the continuous, direct revelation granted to His prophets, people have tried to come closer to Him through worship.

MOSES' REQUEST TO SEE GOD

We appointed Moses thirty nights [on the Mountain], and We added ten, so the forty nights set by his Sustainer were fulfilled. And Moses said unto his brother Aaron: "You take my place among my people, and act righteously and follow not the path of corruption spreaders." When Moses came [to the Mountain] at the time set by Us, and his Sustainer spoke unto him, he said: "O my Sustainer! Show [Thyself] unto me, so that I might behold Thee!" Said [Allah]: "Never can you see Me. However, as long as this mountain remains firm in its place, then—only then—will you see Me." And as soon as His Sustainer revealed His glory to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust, and Moses fell in a swoon. And when he came to himself, he said: "Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! Unto Thee do I turn in repentance, and I will always be the first to believe in Thee!" (7:142-143)

Moses spent the first thirty nights preparing spiritually, including fasting. The Law would be revealed to him in the remaining ten. In the Arabic language, a period designated as "night" also comprises days. Moses made many trips to the Mountain to receive God's revelations. In one of his encounters with God, Moses asked if he could see God with his own eyes. The above incident proves man cannot see God. Since Moses was already a believer, his words "First to believe in Thee" do not merely affirm belief in God's existence but also the impossibility of man seeing God.

TABLETS OF THE LAWS

Said [Allah]: “O Moses! I have raised you above all people through the messages I have entrusted you and also through My speaking [to you]. Hold fast; therefore, to what I have vouchsafed you, and be grateful!” And We ordained for him in the Tablets [of the Law] all manner of admonition, clearly spelling out everything. And [We said:] “Hold fast to them with [all your] strength and bid your people hold firmly to their most goodly rules.” (7:144-145)

(9) ISRAELITES REVERTING TO WORSHIPING IDOLS

In the ancient Egyptian religion, Osiris was the god of fertility, agriculture, the afterlife, the dead, resurrection, life, and vegetation. Egyptians worshipped the sacred bull Apis in Memphis. They believed it was an incarnation of the god Ptah. A new Apis was always supposed to be born when the old one died. His soul passed into Osiris in the Realm of the Dead and was worshipped as Osiris-Apis (the “Serapis” of the Greco-Egyptian period).

THE TEMPTATION TO WORSHIP IDOLS

We brought the children of Israel across the sea. They came across people dedicated to worshipping their idols. Said [the children of Israel], “O Moses set up a god, even as they have gods!” He replied: “You are people without any awareness [of right and wrong]! Their way of life is bound to lead to destruction, and worthless is all they have ever done!” [And] he said: “Am I to seek for you a deity other than Allah, although it is He who has favored you above all other people?” And [he reminded them of this word of Allah]: “Lo, We saved you from Pharaoh’s people who afflicted you with cruel suffering, slaying your sons in great numbers and sparing [only] your women—which was an awesome trial from your Sustainer.” (7:138-141)

It appears this passage is part of Moses' reminder to his people of the reason God has favored Jews above all people by having raised so many prophets out of their midst.

The Quran describes two incidents where Israelites expressed affinity for idol worship due to centuries-old Egyptian influences. The first incident occurred during their wandering in the desert in Moses' presence, as described above. The children of Israel came across people dedicated to idol worship. The Quran does not say who those people were. They probably belong to the group of Arabian tribes referred to in the Bible as Amalekites. These tribes inhabited southernmost Palestine, the adjoining Hijaz regions, and parts of the Sinai Peninsula. The second incident occurred in the absence of Moses; Israelites resorted to worshipping the golden calf.

The Quran alludes to the psychological fact that a community that attains political and social freedom after centuries of bondage remains for a long time subject to the demoralizing influences of its past and cannot all at once develop a spiritual and social discipline of its own.

WORSHIP OF THE GOLDEN CALF

In his absence, the people of Moses worshiped the effigy of a calf [made] from their ornaments, which gave forth a lowing sound. Did they not know it could neither speak [And yet] they worshipped it, for they were evildoers. (7:148)

The Israelites' golden calf was due to centuries-old Egyptian influences. During Moses' absence, when he was on the Mountain of God, the Israelites decided to make a golden calf and start worshipping it. The "lowing sound" the golden calf emitted was probably produced by wind effects, as with some hollow Egyptian temple effigies.

SAMARITAN LED THEM TO ASTRAY

[Allah said]: “Now what has caused you, O Moses, to leave your people behind in so great a haste?” He answered: “They are treading in my footsteps while I have hastened to Thee, O my Sustainer, so that Thou might be well-pleased [with me].” Said He: “Then [know that], in your absence, We have put your people to the test, and the Samaritan has led them astray.” (20:83-85)

This passage relates to Moses' Mountain ascent. “O, Moses...why did you leave your people behind in such haste?” Thus implying that he should not have left them alone, without his guidance, at so early a stage in their freedom.

Moses assumes that the children of Israel would follow his guidance even in his absence—a belief that proved erroneous. The Samaritan in question was an Egyptian converted to Moses' faith. He joined the Israelites on their exodus from Egypt (see 7:124). This Samaritan introduced the Israelites to the worship of the golden calf, a replica of the Egyptian cult of Apis.

AARON'S EXPLANATION

When Moses returned to his people, full of wrath and sorrow, he exclaimed: “Vile is the course you have followed in my absence! Have you forsaken our Sustainer's commandment?” And he threw down the Tablets [of the Law], and seized his brother's head, dragging him towards himself. Cried Aaron: “O my mother's son! Behold, the people brought me low and almost slew me: so, let not mine enemies rejoice at my affliction and count me not among the evil-doing folk!” (7:150) [Moses] said: “O Aaron! What has prevented thee, when it became apparent that they had gone astray, from [abandoning them and] following me? Hast thou, then, [deliberately] disobeyed my commandment?” Answered [Aaron], “O my mother's son! Seize me not by my beard, nor by my head! I was afraid lest [on your return] you say,

***'You have caused a split among the children of Israel and have paid no heed to my bidding!'* (20:92-94)**

Contrary to the Biblical account (Exodus 32:1-5), the Quran does not accuse Aaron of participating in making or worshipping the golden calf. His guilt consisted of remaining passive in the face of his people's idolatry for fear of splitting them.

AARON'S WARNING TO ISRAELITES

Even before [the return of Moses] Aaron said to them: "O my people! You are but being tempted to evil by this idol, since your [only] Sustainer is the Most Gracious! Follow me, then, and obey my bidding!" [But] they answered: "By no means shall we cease to worship it until Moses comes back to us!" (20:90-91)

Obey my bidding and do not follow the Samaritan. This is in sharp contrast to the Bible (Exodus 32:1-5), which declares Aaron guilty of making and worshipping the golden calf.

ISRAELITES' DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS

Moses returned to his people full of wrath and sorrow, [and] exclaimed: "O my people! Did not your Sustainer hold out [many] a goodly promise to you? Did [the fulfillment of] this promise seem too long in coming? Or are you, perchance, determined to see your Sustainer's condemnation fall upon you, and so you broke your promise to me?" They answered: "We did not break our promise of our own free will, but [this is what happened] we were loaded with the [sinful] burdens of the [Egyptian] people's ornaments, so we threw them [into the fire], and likewise, did this Samaritan cast [his into it]." (20:86-87).

Exodus 12:35 states that before leaving Egypt, the Israelites borrowed jewels of silver and gold from the Egyptians. The Israelites borrowed the jewelry with the intention of not returning it to its rightful owners. The Biblical statement (verse 36), "they

spoiled [i.e., robbed] the Egyptians” by doing so. While it is noteworthy that the Old Testament does not condemn this behavior, its iniquity seems to have gradually dawned upon the Israelites. So, they decided to discard those sinfully acquired ornaments.

SAMARITAN MADE AN EFFIGY OF CALF FROM MOLTEN GOLD

But then, [so they told Moses, the Samaritan] had produced for them [out of the molten gold] the effigy of a calf, which made a lowing sound. Thereupon, they said [to one another], “This is your deity, and the deity of Moses but he has forgotten [his past]!” Why did they not realize that [the thing] could not respond and had no power to harm or benefit them? (20:88-89)

“He has forgotten his past” refers to Moses’ upbringing at Pharaoh’s court, where idol worship was the norm.

WORSHIPING MATERIAL OBJECT

And lo, We accepted your solemn pledge, raising the Mountain high above you, [saying,] “Hold fast with [all your] strength to what We have vouchsafed you, and hearken unto it!” [But] they say, “We have heard, but we disobey”—for their hearts are overflowing with the love of the [golden] calf due to their refusal to acknowledge the truth. Say: “Vile is what this [false] belief of yours enjoins upon you—if indeed, you are believers!” (2:93)

As soon as they turned away from Moses’ genuine message, they lapsed into worshipping material goods, symbolized by the golden calf. The Israelites may not have uttered the words

“We have heard, but we disobey,” but their subsequent behavior justifies the statement.

MOSES CONFRONTED THE SAMARITAN

Said [Moses]: “What, then, did you have in view, O Samaritan?” He answered: “I have gained insight into something they were unable to see, and so, I took hold of a handful of the Apostle’s teachings and cast it away: for thus has my mind prompted me [to act].” Said [Moses]: “Begone, then! And it shall be your lot to say throughout [your] life, ‘Touch me not!’ But [in the life to come], you shall be faced with a destiny from which there will be no escape! And [now] look at this, your deity, whose worship you have become so devoted: we shall most certainly burn it, and then scatter [whatever remains of] it far and wide over the sea! Your only deity is Allah—He, save for whom there is no deity, [and who] embraces all things within His knowledge!” (20:95-98)

“Touch me not” is a metaphorical description of the loneliness and social ostracism the Samaritan would find himself in. “I have gained insight”—or I realized what the rest of the people did not—namely, that some of your beliefs, O Moses, were wrong.

THE PURPOSE OF THE GOLDEN CALF STORY

The Samaritan objected to the idea of a transcendental, imperceptible God and believed that people ought to have something more tangible to worship. The Samaritan’s rejection of Moses’ teachings explains the subconscious tendency underlying all forms of idolatry. The attribution of divine qualities to things or beings other than God is a futile, self-deceiving hope of bringing the unperceivable closer to one’s limited perception by creating a concrete image of the Divine Being. All such endeavors obscure rather than illuminate man’s understanding of God. They defeat their purpose and destroy the spiritual potential of the misguided devotee.

EXPRESSION OF REMORSE BY ISRAELITES

Although [later] when they [Israelites] smite their hands in remorse, believing they had gone astray, they would say, “Indeed, unless our Sustainer has mercy on us and grants us forgiveness, we shall certainly be among the lost!” (7:149)

This refers to later repentance for the Israelites, after Moses’ return from the Mountain of God. “Smite their hands” is an idiomatic phrase of intense remorse, probably derived from the striking (“falling”) of hand upon hand as an expression of grief or regret.

MOSES RECOVERED THE TABLETS

Said [Moses]: “O my Sustainer! Grant Thou forgiveness unto me [for my anger and harshness] and my brother and admit us to Thy grace: for Thou art the most merciful of the merciful!” [And to Aaron, he said]: “As for those who have taken to worshipping the [golden] calf, their Sustainer’s condemnation will overtake them, and ignominy [will be their lot] in the life of this world!” For thus, We do requite all who invent [such] falsehood. But as for those who do sinful deeds and repent and [truly] believe. After such repentance, thy Sustainer is indeed much forgiving, a dispenser of grace! When Moses’ wrath subsided, he took up the tablets, in the writing whereof there was guidance and grace for all who stood in awe of their Sustainer. (7:151-154).

“Invent such falsehood” refers to any false imagery that deflects man from worshiping One God; this expression describes the attribution of divine qualities to any concrete or imaginary object or person, the false statements about God, His attributes, or the content of His messages. Bible (Exodus 32:19) says Moses broke the tablets when he threw them down in anger. The Quranic narrative, however, shows them intact.

PRAYERS OF FORGIVENESS BY THE SEVENTY ELDERS

Moses chose seventy men to come [and pray for forgiveness] at a time set by Us. Then, when violent trembling seized them, he prayed: “O my Sustainer! Had Thou so willed, Thou would have destroyed them before this and me [with them]. Will Thou destroy us for what the weak-minded among us have done? [All] this is but a trial from Thee, whereby Thou let going astray whom Thou will, and guide aright whom Thou will. Thou are near to us: grant us, then, forgiveness and have mercy on us—for Thou art the best of all forgivers! And Thou ordain for us what is good in this world and in the life to come: unto Thee have we turned in repentance!” [Allah] answered: “With My chastisement, I afflict whom I will—but My grace overspreads everything.” (7:155-156)

The violent trembling, which seized the seventy elders, was caused by their intense regret and fear of God’s punishment.

THE LESSON FOR ALL BELIEVERS

And [did We not say], when We caused the Mountain to quake above the children of Israel as though it was a [mere] shadow, and they imagined it would fall upon them, “Hold fast with [all your] strength to what We have vouchsafed you, and bear in mind all that is therein so that you might remain conscious of Allah?” (7:171)

According to the Quran, their story is an object lesson for all believers of any community or time. “When We shook the mountain over them” refers to an earthquake during the Revelation of the Law (the tablets) to Moses.

GOD’S FORGIVENESS FOR IDOL WORSHIP SIN

And when We appointed Moses forty nights [on the Mountain], and in his absence, you worshipped the [golden] calf, and thus

became evildoers. Yet, even after that, We blotted out this sin so that you might be grateful. And [remember the time] when We vouchsafed to Moses the divine writ, a standard by which to discern the true from the false—so that you might be guided aright. When Moses said to his people: You have sinned against yourselves by worshipping the calf; turn, then, in repentance to your Maker and mortify yourselves; this will be the best for you in your Maker’s sight.” And He accepted your repentance: for He alone is the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace. (2:51-54)

"The standard by which to discern the true from the false" refers to the faculty of moral valuation, which distinguishes every human being who is truly conscious of God. The expression "kill yourselves" is used metaphorically, i.e., "mortify yourselves."

(10) FROM THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD TO TRANSJORDAN

SPIES TO CANAAN

Indeed, Allah accepted a [similar] solemn pledge from the children of Israel when We caused twelve of their leaders to be sent [to Canaan as spies]. And Allah said: “I shall be with you! If you are constant in prayer, spend in charity, trust in My apostles and aid them, and offer Allah a goodly loan [by doing righteous deeds]. I will surely efface your sinful deeds and bring you into gardens through which running waters flow. But he from among you, who, after this, denies the truth, will indeed have strayed from the right path!” Then, for having broken their solemn pledge, We rejected them and caused their hearts to harden [so that now] they distort the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of their context. They have forgotten much of what they were told to remember. Treachery will always be present among most of them. But pardon them, and forbear: Allah loves good doers. (5:12-13)

Above is a reference to the Biblical story (in Numbers 13). God commanded Moses to send one leading personality from each of the twelve tribes to spy in Canaan before the Israelites invaded it. The subsequent near revolt of the Israelites was caused by their fear of the powerful tribes that inhabited Canaan (Numbers 14). The solemn pledge was related to obedience to God's commandments, breaking their oath due to their insufficient trust in God.

REFUSAL TO FIGHT CANAANITES

And lo, Moses said to his people: "O my people! Remember the blessings Allah bestowed upon you when He raised prophets among you and made you your own masters. He granted you [favours] like He had not granted anyone else in the world. O my people! Enter the holy land Allah has promised you, but do not turn back [on your faith], for then you will be lost!" They answered: "O Moses! Ferocious people dwell in that land, and we will surely not enter it unless they depart from there, but if they depart, we will enter it." [Whereupon] two men from among those who feared [Allah, and] whom Allah had blessed, said: "Enter them through the gate [by frontal attack]—for as soon as you approach it, you shall be victorious! And in Allah, you must place your trust if you are [truly] believers!" [But] they said: "O Moses! Go forth, then, you and your Sustainer, and fight, both of you! We shall remain here!" (5:20-24)

“Made you your master”; lit., “made you kings.” The Israelites' "kingship" is a metaphorical allusion to their freedom and independence after their Egyptian bondage. The term “king” refers to a free man who is the master of his affairs and can, therefore, adopt any way of life he chooses. Moses appeals to the children of Israel as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. The Israelites' refusal to enter the holy land illustrates breaking their solemn pledge. Numbers 13:32-33 and 14 describe the terror that overwhelmed the Israelites when hearing the report of the twelve scouts and the

punishment of their cowardice and lack of faith. According to the Bible (Numbers 14:6-9, 24, 30, and 38), the two God-fearing men were Joshua and Caleb, who were among the twelve spies sent out to explore Canaan and who now tried to persuade the terror-stricken children of Israel to trust God. This story of the Israelites, as told so often in the Quran, illustrates the difference between genuine, selfless faith and worldly self-love.

WANDERING FOR FORTY YEARS

Prayed [Moses], “O my Sustainer! Of none am I a master but of myself and my brother [Aaron]: draw Thou then, a dividing line between these iniquitous folks and us!” Answered He, “This [land] shall be forbidden to them for forty years, while they wander on Earth, bewildered, to and fro; and you should not sorrow over these iniquitous folks.” (5:25-26)

After leaving the Mountain of God, Moses faced increasing resistance and frustration from the Israelites. The pessimistic report of the spies sent to reconnoiter thwarted Moses’ desire to march north and conquer Canaan. They almost stoned him when he urged the people to reconsider their actions. In Transjordan, Moses was refused safe passage, and various battles ensued between the Israelites and local kings. Moses climbed to a vantage point on Mount Pisgah and viewed the Promised Land upon reaching the Jordan Valley. He died shortly after that, and his death and burial circumstances remain shrouded in mystery. Moses himself never set foot in the Promised Land. Before they arrived at the border of the Promised Land, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

PROMISED LAND FOR THE JEWS

The term '**Palestine**' originally designated a small area of land in the southern coastal plain of Canaan occupied by the Philistines. This was roughly south of Tel Aviv. With Moses' passing, Joshua

assumed Israelite leadership. Under his leadership, Canaan was conquered, including Jericho. The land known as **Canaan** was situated in the southern Levant. This area today encompasses Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, and the southern portions of Syria and Lebanon.

And [remember] when you were told: “Dwell in this land [Palestine] and eat of its food as you may desire; but say, ‘Remove Thou from us the burden of our sins,’ and enter the gate humbly. [Whereupon] We shall forgive you your sins [and] amply reward the doers of good.” But those bent on wrongdoing substituted another saying for what was given to them before. So, We unleashed a plague from Heaven in requital of all their evil doings. (7:161-162)

“Dwell in this land” refers to Palestine. Thus, the Israelites were admonished to take possession of the Promised Land (enter the gate) in a spirit of humility (lit., “prostrating yourselves”) and not to regard it as something due to them. In the above verse, the wrongdoers "substituted another saying" as a metaphor for their attitudes. The substitution signifies a willful display of arrogance in disregard of God’s command.

Another plausible explanation may be related to the area called **Shittim**. It is a large area directly across from Jericho. Shittim is significant in Israel’s history because it is the site of the last encampment of the nation at the end of the wilderness wanderings. This is just before crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. In Shittim, the Israelites were enticed into idolatrous Baal worship and immoral sexual relations with Moabite and Midianite women. Angered by their unfaithfulness, the Lord sent a plague on Israel, killing twenty-four thousand (Numbers 25).

MASSACRE OF CANAANITES

According to the Old Testament: *“They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both men and women, young and old, ox, sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. And they burned the city with fire, and all therein. Only the silver, the gold, the vessels of brass and iron, they put into the Treasury of the house of the Lord”* (Joshua 6, 21, and 24).

It is inconceivable that God of mercy and love would sanction such barbaric slaughter of innocent non-combatants. Through perverse logic and twisted morality, one can justify the killing of children who may grow up and take revenge for such atrocities. But why kill animals and old people? This genocidal mindset of Jewish zealots is falsely attributed to the God of love. Whether the extermination is of six million Jews or massacres of biblical proportions, all such evil acts should be condemned. Murderous acts are far worse than idolatrous worship, or illicit relationships with pagan women, for which Israelites were severely punished. Every decent and morally upright human being should condemn the killing of non-combatants, regardless of their race, religion, caste or creed.

(11) GUIDANCE FOR MOSES AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Once again: We vouchsafed the divine writ unto Moses in fulfillment [of Our favor] upon those who persevered in doing good, clearly spelling out everything, and [thus providing] guidance and grace, so that they might have faith in the [final] meeting with their Sustainer. (6:154)

“Spelling out everything” they needed by laws and injunctions appropriate to their time and stage of development. See in this connection the phrase, “To every one of you have We appointed a different law and way of life,” occurring in 5:48.

We shall certainly succor Our apostles and those who have attained faith, [both] in this world’s life and on the Day when all

the witnesses shall stand up. The Day when their excuses are of no avail to the evildoers. Realizing their lot will be rejection of all that is good and a woeful hereafter. And indeed, We bestowed guidance on Moses, and [thus] made the children of Israel heirs to the divine writ. [It was revealed] as guidance and a reminder for those endowed with insight. Hence, you remain patient in adversity for Allah's promise always comes true—and ask forgiveness for your sins and extol thy Sustainer's glory and praise by night and by day. (40:51-55)

As regards the term Lanah (“Rejection from all that is good,” its primary significance is “estrangement” or “rejection”; in Qur’anic terminology, it denotes “rejection from all that is good” (Lisan al-Arab) and, specifically, “estrangement from God’s grace” (Zamakhshari).

“Those of the children of Israel who were endowed with insight” could, therefore, benefit from Moses' message. It reminds the Quran followers that this divine writ is also for those endowed with insight, for people who think and use their reason. And thus, too, We have bestowed Our revelation upon Muhammad.

PEACE BE UPON MOSES AND AARON

Thus, indeed, We bestowed Our favor upon Moses and Aaron; and We saved them and their people from the awesome calamity [of bondage], and succored them, so that [in the end] it was they who achieved victory. And We gave them the divine writ that made [right and wrong] distinct, and guided them on the straight way, and left them thereby to be remembered among later generations: “Peace be upon Moses and Aaron!” Thus, We reward the doers of good—for those two were truly among Our believing servants. (37:114-122)

The favor shown to Moses and Aaron was in consideration of their merit. The divine writ, the Torah, provided guidance and light to those who followed the Jewish faith” (5:44).

RIGHTEOUS AMONG ISRAELITES

Among the folk of Moses, some people would guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light. (7:159)

There have always been righteous people among the Israelites. It is meant to contrast this righteousness with the rebellious sinfulness displayed throughout Biblical history.

ASPERSIONS CAST UPON MOSES

O you who have attained faith! Be not like those [children of Israel] who offended Moses, and [remember] Allah showed him innocent of whatever they alleged [against Him or demanded of Him]: for of the highest honor was he in Allah's sight. (33:69)

These are the aspersions cast upon Moses by some of his followers and mentioned in the Old Testament (e.g., Numbers 12:1-13). For example, the blasphemous demands of which the Quran speaks—e.g., “O Moses, indeed we shall not believe thee until we see God face to face” (2:55) or “Go forth, you and your Sustainer, and fight, both of you!” (5:24).

DEMAND TO SEE GOD BY THE ISRAELITES

[Remember] when you said, “O Moses, indeed we shall not believe you unless we see Allah face to face!” Whereupon the thunderbolt of punishment overtook you before your eyes. But We raised you again after you had been as dead so that you might have cause to be grateful. (2:55-56)

The Quran does not state what form this “thunderbolt of punishment” took, but the element of vehemence and suddenness

was inherent in it. The expression “dead” does not always denote physical death. In certain contexts, it means “dead as to the senses,” or intellectually dead or even “he slept.”

REJECTION OF MOSES’ TEACHING BY SOME ISRAELITES

Indeed, [similar was the case when] We vouchsafed the divine writ unto Moses, and some of his people set their views against it. Had it not been for a decree already passed forth from thy Sustainer, the judgment would indeed have been passed on them [then and there]: for they were in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about him [who called them to Allah]. (11:110)

Some Israelites held conflicting views, meaning that, like Muhammad’s early contemporaries, some of Moses’ people accepted the divine writ. However, others refused to submit to its guidance. They would have been punished, like those communities of old, by utter destruction. However, God decreed that their punishment should be deferred until the Day of the Resurrection. 2:55—“O Moses, indeed, we shall not believe you until we see God face to face!”

THE WAY OF THE WICKED

I will show you the way the wicked shall go. My message shall turn away all those who, without right, behave haughtily on Earth. Though they see every sign [of truth], they do not believe in it. They may know the path of righteousness but do not follow it. While, if they see a way of error, they take it for their own. This is because they have given the lie to Our messages and have remained unmindful of them. Hence, all who give the lie to Our messages, and [thus] to the truth of the life to come—in vain shall be all their doings. [For] they are to be rewarded for anything but what they did? (7:145-147)

“I will show you” has general import not confined to Moses. God’s letting sinners to sin is a consequence of their behavior and free choice. By “those who...without any right behave haughtily on Earth” means people who think their judgment of what constitutes right and wrong is the only valid one. They refuse to submit their concerns to absolute criteria (i.e., revealed) moral standards; see 96:6-7—“man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient.”

NONE WILL HAVE A PRIVILEGED POSITION ON THE JUDGMENT DAY

After that, We said to the children of Israel: “Dwell now securely on earth, but when the promise of the Last Day comes to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!” (17:104)

“A motley crowd” is composed of innumerable heterogeneous elements, good and bad, strong and weak, fortunate and unfortunate. The Quran rejects the claim that any group will have a privileged position on Resurrection Day.

THE STORY OF MOSES AND MUHAMMAD

Now [as for you, O Muhammad,] you were not present on the sunset slope [of the Mountain] when We imposed the Law upon Moses, nor were you among those who witnessed [his times]. But [between them and you] We brought into existence many generations, and long was their life span. We have [always] been sending [Our message-bearers to man]. And neither were you present on the Mountain slope when We called out [to Moses]. But [you too, are sent] as an act of thy Sustainer’s grace, to warn people to whom no warner has come before you so that they might bethink themselves [of Us]. And [We have sent you] lest they say [on Judgment Day] when disaster befalls them as an outcome of what their own hands have wrought. “O our Sustainer, if only

Thou had sent an apostle unto us, we would have followed Thy message and been among the believers!" (28:44-47)

The implication of the last verse above is that Moses' story, as narrated in the Quran, could not have come to Muhammad's knowledge except through revelation. The second reference to "the slope of Mountain" contains an allusion to the divine assurance mentioned in 7:156: "My grace overspreads everything." This interpretation is most plausible, considering the subsequent reference to Muhammad's mission as "an act of thy Sustainer's grace."

THE LEGEND OF QARUN (FALSE PRIDE AND SELF-EXALTATION)

The conventional identification of Qarun with the Korah of the Old Testament (Numbers 16) is neither relevant nor warranted by the Quranic text—more so as the purport of this legend is a moral lesson and not a historical narrative. It also explains the juxtaposition, elsewhere in the Quran (29:39 and 40:24), of Qarun with Pharaoh, the arch-sinner. Qarun was one of Moses' people. Even a follower of one of God's greatest apostles was not above sinning under false pride and self-exaltation.

[Now,] Qarun was one of Moses' people. He arrogantly exalted himself above them—simply because We had granted him such riches that his treasure-chests alone would indeed have been too heavy a burden for a troop of ten men or even more. When [they perceived his arrogance], his people said to him: "Exult not [in your wealth], for Allah does not love those who rejoice [in vain things]! Seek instead, through what Allah has granted you, [the good of] the life to come, without forgetting your own [rightful] share in this world. Do good [to others] as Allah has done good to you and seek not to spread corruption on Earth, for Allah does not love corruption spreaders!" (28:76-77)

The treasure chest was too heavy for a company of ten or more (up to forty) persons. It is used here as a metaphor, pointing to the great weight involved. “Do good to others”: a call to generosity by spending on charity and good causes, at the same time, to moderation (2:143: “We have willed you to be a community of the middle way”).

Answered he, “This [wealth] was given to me only by virtue of knowledge in me!” Did he not know that Allah had destroyed [the arrogance of] many a generation that preceded him— people greater than him in power and richer in what they had amassed? But those lost in sin may not be asked about their sins. He went forth before his people in his pomp. Those who cared only for this life would say, “if we had the likes of what Qarun has! With tremendous, good fortune, he is blessed!” But those who possess true knowledge say: “Woe unto you! Merit in the sight of Allah [spiritual merit] is by far the best for any who attains faith and does what is right. but none save the patient in adversity can ever achieve this [blessing].” We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling. He had none and nothing to aid him against Allah, nor was he of those who could assist themselves. (28:78-81)

The wealth I have accumulated is due to my own experience, shrewdness, and ability. Qarun being swallowed by the Earth may be a metaphor for a catastrophic, unforeseen loss—from whatever cause—of all his worldly goods and, thus, of his erstwhile grandeur. “But those lost in sin may not be asked about their sins:” implying as a rule, blind to their failings and, therefore, not responsive to admonition.

And on the morrow, those who but yesterday had longed to be in his place exclaimed: “Alas [for our not having been aware] that it is indeed Allah [alone] who grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in a scant measure, to whomever He wills of His creatures! Had not Allah been gracious to us, He might have caused [the Earth] to swallow us, too! Alas [for our having forgotten] that those who

deny the truth can never attain a happy state!” For the [joyful] life in the hereafter, We grant it [only] to those who do not seek exaltation on Earth, nor yet spread corruption: for the future belongs to the God-conscious. Whoever shall come [before Allah] with a virtuous deed will gain [further]good. As for any who shall come with a sinful act—[know that] they who do evil deeds will not be requited with more than [the like of] what they have done. (28:82-84) And [thus, too, We dealt with] Qarun and Pharaoh, and Haman: to them had come Moses with all evidence of the truth, but they behaved arrogantly on Earth [and rejected him]; and they could not escape [Us]. (29:39)

The above paragraph clarifies that one must not seek worldly grandeur or self-indulgence to have spiritual value. Instead, spiritual value comes not from indifference or lack of opportunity but from a conscious moral choice. The common denominator between Qarun, Pharaoh, and Haman is their false pride and arrogance, which causes them to become archetypes of evil (28:41)

Chapter 10

THE SAGE AL-KHADIR

THE PARABLE OF MOSES AND HIS QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

We have a tradition that God rebuked Moses for asserting he was the wisest of all men. Through revelation, he was told that a “servant of God” who lived at the “junction of the two seas” was far superior to him in wisdom. When Moses expressed his eagerness to find that man, God commanded him to “take a fish in a basket” and continue until the fish disappeared. Its disappearance was a sign that the goal had been reached. This tradition is a symbolic introduction to our Quranic parable of the mysterious Sage. He is spoken of as Al-Khadir, meaning “the Green One,” an epithet rather than a name, implying that his wisdom was ever fresh (green) and eternal. We have a legendary figure symbolizing a profound depth of mystic insight not accessible to man.

DISAPPEARANCE OF FISH

And lo! [during his wanderings], Moses said to his servant: “I shall not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas, even if I [have to] spend untold years [in my quest]!” But when they reached the junction between the two [seas], they forgot all about their fish, and it took its way into the sea and disappeared. And after the two marched some distance, [Moses] said to his servant: “Bring us our midday meal; we have indeed suffered hardship on this [day of] our journey!” Said [the servant]: “Would you believe it? When we got to that rock for a rest, I forgot about the fish—and none but Satan made me thus forget it! And it made its way into the sea! How strange!” [Moses] exclaimed: “That was the place we sought!” (18:60-64)

The “fish” mentioned is an ancient religious symbol, possibly signifying divine knowledge or immortality. The “two seas” represent the two sources or streams of knowledge—the one obtainable through the observation and intellectual coordination of outward phenomena and the other through intuitive, mystic insight—the meeting of which is the real goal of Moses’ quest. According to tradition, “His servant” was Joshua, who became the Israelites’ leader after Moses’ death. Their forgetting the symbolic “fish” is perhaps an allusion to man’s frequently forgetting that God is the ultimate source of all knowledge and life. The fish disappeared, indicating their quest had ended.

YOU WILL NEVER HAVE PATIENCE WITH ME

The two turned back, retracing their footsteps, and found one of Our servants. We had bestowed grace from Ourselves and unto whom We had imparted knowledge [issuing] from Ourselves. Moses said unto him: “May I follow you with the understanding that you will impart to me something of that consciousness of what is right, given to you?” [The other] answered: “You will never have patience with me—for how you could be patient about something that you cannot comprehend within the compass of [your] experience?” (18:64-68)

“You will never have patience with me” is an allusion that even a prophet like Moses did not fully comprehend the inner reality of things, as appearance and reality do not always coincide. Man cannot understand or visualize anything without a counterpart in his own intellectual experience. This is the reason for the Quranic use of metaphor and allegory regarding “all beyond the reach of a created being’s perception” (al-ghayb).

HOLE IN THE BOAT

Replied [Moses], “You will find me patient if Allah so wills, and I shall not disobey you in anything!” Said [the Sage]: “Well, then,

if you are to follow me, do not question me about anything [that I may do] until I give you an account thereof.” And so the two went on their way, until [they reached the seashore]. When they disembarked from the boat [that had ferried them across], the Sage made a hole in it. Moses exclaimed: “Have you made a hole in it to drown the people who may be [traveling] in it? Indeed, you have done a grievous thing!” He replied: “Did I not tell you that you will never have patience with me?” Said [Moses], “Take me not to task for having forgotten [myself] and be not harsh on me on account of what I have done!” (18:69-73)

THE SLAYING OF A YOUNG MAN

And so, the two walked on until, when they met a young man, [the Sage] slew him— [whereupon Moses] exclaimed: “Have you slain an innocent human being without [his taking] another man’s life? Indeed, you have done a terrible thing!” He replied: “Did I not tell you that you will never have patience with me?” Said [Moses]: “If, after this, I should ever question you, keep me not in your company: [for by] now you have heard enough excuses from me.” (18:74-76)

BUILDING A WALL

So, the two traveled on until they came across some village people. They asked them for food, but those [people] refused hospitality. And they saw in that [village] a wall, on the point of tumbling down. [The Sage] rebuilt it. [Moses] said: “Had you so wished, surely you could [at least] have obtained some payment for it?” (18:77)

THE REAL MEANING OF THE ABOVE EVENTS

[The Sage] replied: “This is the parting of ways between you and me. [And now] I shall let you know the actual meaning of all [those events] that you were unable to bear with patience: “As for

that boat, it belonged to some needy people who toiled upon the sea. I wanted to damage it because [I knew] behind them was a king who wanted to seize every boat by brute force. And as for that young man, his parents were [true] believers. Whereas we had every reason to fear that he would bring bitter grief upon them by [his] overweening wickedness and denial of all truth. So, we desired their Sustainer grant them in his stead [a child] of greater purity than him and closer [to them] in loving tenderness.” (18:78-81)

The Sage’s expression of “fear” was synonymous with positive knowledge gained through outward evidence or mystic insight, the latter being more probable.

“And as for that wall, it belonged to two orphan boys [living] in the town, and beneath it was [buried] a treasure belonging to them [by right]. Now their father was a righteous man, and so thy Sustainer willed it that when they come of age, they should bring forth their treasure by thy Sustainer’s grace. “And I did not do [any of] this of my own accord. This is the true meaning of all [those events] that you were unable to bear with patience.” (18:82)

The buried treasure under the wall was their inheritance. The treasure would have been exposed if the wall had fallen. The greedy village folk would have stolen the prize; they had shown their true character by refusing all hospitality to weary travelers. “I did not do [any of] this of my own accord.” Whatever he had done was done under the impulsion of higher truth—the mystic insight revealed to him the reality behind the outward appearance of things and made him a conscious particle in God’s unfathomable plan. This explains the use of the plural “we” in verses 80-81 and the direct attribution, in the first paragraph of verse 82, of concrete human action to God’s will.

Chapter 11

SAMUEL, KING SAUL, AND DAVID

SAMUEL THE PROPHET

Samuel was a religious hero, Prophet, Judge, and military leader in the history of Israel. After Joshua dies, the nation of Israel enters the “days of the judges,” when there was no centralized government. The book of Judges tells us about 12 judges, and First Samuel introduces two more: Eli and Samuel. Samuel thus appears as a leader in all Israel; his leadership is exercised in war and law, but his authority is religious, primarily prophetic. He is revered as a Prophet by the Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

The children of Israel faced many invasions of their homelands by their perennial enemies, the Philistines, Amorites, Amalekites, and other Semitic and Non-Semitic tribes. The passages below describe how God enabled Israelites to defend themselves against aggression.

SAUL THE KING OF ISRAEL

Are you not aware of those elders of the children of Israel, after the time of Moses, how they said to a prophet of theirs, [Samuel,] “Raise a king for us, [and] we shall fight in Allah’s cause?” Said he, “Would you perchance refrain from fighting if fighting is ordained for you?” They answered: “Why should we not fight in Allah’s cause when our children and we have been driven from our homelands?” Yet, when fighting was ordained for them, they did turn back, save for a few of them; but Allah had full knowledge of the evildoers. (2:246)

The Prophet Samuel played a key role in the transition from the biblical judges' period to the institution of monarchy. According to the Old Testament, 1 Samuel, Israelites demanded Samuel to

appoint a king for them so that Israel would be like other nations. Samuel was displeased because monarchy was not part of Jewish tradition. God permits Samuel to elect a king and directs him to anoint Saul, a tall man from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was the first king of the United Kingdom of Israel (Israel and Judah). Traditionally, his reign is placed in the late 11th century BCE. Bible says Saul marshaled military forces to fight the Ammonites, Edomites, Moabites, Amalekites, and Philistines.

KING SAUL NOT ENDOWED WITH ABUNDANT WEALTH

And their Prophet [Samuel] said unto those elders: “Now Allah has raised Saul to be your king.” They said: “How can he have dominion over us when we have a better claim to dominion than he, and he has not [even] been endowed with abundant wealth?” [The Prophet] replied: “Allah has exalted him above you and endowed him abundantly with knowledge and bodily perfection. And Allah bestows His dominion upon whom He wills: for Allah is infinite, all-knowing.” (2:247) And their Prophet [Samuel] said unto them: “It shall be a sign of his [rightful] dominion. You will be granted a heart endowed by your Sustainer with inner peace. And with all enduring in the angel-borne heritage left behind by the House of Moses and the House of Aaron. Herein, there shall indeed be a sign for you if you are [truly] believers.” (2:248)

“God bestows His dominion upon whom He wills” is a reminder of the Quranic doctrine that all dominion and all that man may own, belong to God alone, and that man holds it only in His trust. The expression "angel-born" alludes to the God-inspired nature of the enduring spiritual legacy left by those two prophets, Moses, and Aaron.

BATTLE WITH THE PHILISTINES

When Saul set out with his forces, he said: "Allah will now test you by a river: he who drinks it will not belong to me. While he who refrains from tasting it, he, indeed, will belong to me, but forgiven shall be he who scoops up but a single handful." However, they all drank [their fill] of it, save for a few of them. And as soon as he and those who had kept faith with him crossed the river, the others said: "No strength we have today [to stand up] against Goliath and his forces!" [Yet] those who knew with certainty that they were destined to meet Allah replied: "How often has a small host overcome a great host by Allah's leave! For Allah is with those who are patient in adversity." (2:249)

Soldiers' lack of faith in God is evident from Saul's command regarding the water. The symbolic implication of drinking from the river is that belief in one's cause's justice has no value unless heightened self-discipline accompanies it.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE AMALEKITES

Samuel directed Saul to "utterly destroy" the Amalekites in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 25:17-19:

"When the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance,... you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." During the campaign against the Amalekites, King Saul spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and the finest of their livestock. This was in violation of the Lord's command, as Samuel pronounced to "... utterly destroy all they have and spare them not; but slay men, women, infants and sucklings, ox, sheep, camels and ass." (1 Samuel 15:3)

Samuel confronted Saul for his disobedience and told him that God made him king and could unmake him king. Saul told Samuel that he had spared the Amalekites sheep and oxen of their choice,

intending to sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel executed Agag and informed Saul that God rejected him as king. David, a son of Jesse, a young shepherd from the tribe of Judah, enters the story from this point on. God anointed David as the future king. Saul's story is largely about his increasingly troubled relationship with David.

Saul fell on his sword, committing suicide to avoid capture in battles against the Philistines. Three of his sons were also killed in the same battle. The succession to his throne was contested by his fourth and only surviving son and his son-in-law, David, who eventually prevailed. (1 Samuel 31)

DAVID

DAVID SLAYING GOLIATH

When they came face to face with Goliath and his forces, they prayed: "O our Sustainer! Shower us with patience in adversity, and make firm our steps, and succor us against the people who deny the truth!" And thereupon, by Allah's leave, they routed them. And David slew Goliath and Allah bestowed upon him dominion, wisdom, and imparted knowledge of whatever He willed. And if Allah had not enabled people to defend themselves, corruption would surely overwhelm the Earth: but Allah is limitless in His bounty to all the worlds. (2:250-251)

The Philistines again threatened to attack Israel, this time taunting Israel with their new hero and champion, Goliath—a giant. Goliath challenges single combat, but none of the Israelites accept. David is described as a young shepherd who delivers food to his three eldest brothers in the army and hears Goliath's challenge. David speaks mockingly of the Philistines to some soldiers; his speech is overheard and reported to Saul, who summons David and appoints David as his champion. Refusing the king's armor, David publicly invokes God's help and kills Goliath with a single stone shot from

his sling. The Israelites attack the retreating Philistines and return home, singing praises of David's victory. (1 Samuel 17)

DAVID'S WISDOM AND SAGACITY IN JUDGMENT

Remember, our servant David was endowed with a [great deal] of inner strength! He would always turn to Us: [and for this,] We caused [or constrained] the mountains to join him in extolling Our limitless glory at eventide and sunrise. [Likewise,] the birds in their assemblies: [together] they turn again and again to Him [who had created them]. And We strengthened his dominion and bestowed upon him wisdom and sagacity in judgment. (38:17-20)

THE STORY OF THE TWO LITIGANTS

And yet, has the litigants' story reached your ken? [The story of the two] who surmounted the sanctuary walls [in which David prayed]? As they came upon David, and he shrank back in fear from them, they said: "Fear not! [We are but] two litigants. One of us wronged the other. You judge between us with justice and do not deviate from what is right, and show [both of] us the way to righteousness. Behold, this is my brother: he has ninety-nine ewes, and I have [only] one ewe—and yet he said, 'Make her over to me,' and forcibly prevailed against me in this [our] dispute." Said [David], "He has certainly wronged you by demanding your ewe be added to his ewes!" Thus, do many kinsmen wrong one another—[all] save those who believe [in Allah] and do righteous deeds: but how few are they?" And [suddenly] David understood that We had tested him: so he asked his Sustainer to forgive him his sin, fell in prostration, and turned unto Him in repentance. And thereupon, We forgave him that [sin]: and nearness to Us awaits him [in the life to come], and the most beautiful of all goals! (38:21-25)

While on his roof terrace, David noticed a beautiful woman taking a bath. He fell in love with the woman and on inquiring, he found out she was the wife of one of his officers, Uriah. Impelled by his passion, David ordered his field commander to place Uriah in a particularly exposed battle position. This was where he was sure to be killed. As soon as his order was fulfilled and Uriah died, David married the widow (who became Solomon's mother). This story agrees more or less with the Old Testament, which gives the woman's name as Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), barring the Biblical allegation that David committed adultery with her before Uriah's death. Muslims have always found adultery allegations highly offensive and defamatory.

Whether David committed adultery or not, he was an accessory to murder, a heinous sin by any standard. The two "litigants" were angels sent to David to bring home his sin. Just like one of the stronger litigants forcefully took away the only ewes from his weaker brother, David, having many wives, took away Bathsheba as well by having her husband killed. According to the Old Testament, 2 Samuel: ***"Thus says the Lord, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if this were too little, I would add much more. Why have you despised the Lord's word, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the Ammonites sword and taken his wife to be your wife.'"***

PROPHETS ARE NOT INFALLIBLE

David and Jonah's stories contradict Muslim theologians' doctrine that prophets cannot sin. God's elected prophets—endowed, like David, with wisdom and sagacity in judgment could commit a major sin. They, too, were subject to human nature's weaknesses and not divinely endowed with purity of character that rendered them incapable of sinning. As with any human being, prophets'

purity and subsequent sinlessness are the result of inner struggles and trials.

REPENTANCE

In all this, there is a message for every servant [of Allah] who turns to Him [in repentance]. And [thus], We graced David with Our favor: “O you mountains! Sing with him Allah's praise! And [likewise,] you birds!” And We softened all sharpness in him, [and inspired him thus]: “Do virtuous deeds lavishly, without stint, and give deep thought to their steady flow.” And [thus should you all, O believers], do righteous deeds: for I see all that you do! (34:9-11)

David is singled out for special mention of God's grace when he suddenly realizes he has sinned. He then asked his Sustainer to forgive him of his sin and turned unto Him in repentance. God “softened all sharpness” in David, indicates his exalted sense of beauty (expressed in the poetry of Psalms) and to his goodness and humility. An alternative rendering of the above phrase would be: “We caused iron to become soft for him,” which might be an allusion to his outstanding abilities as a poet, warrior, and ruler.

[And We said]: “O David! We have made you a [prophet and Our] vicegerent on Earth. Judge, then, between men with justice, and do not follow vain desire, lest it lead you astray from Allah's path.” Those who go astray from Allah's path, there is severe suffering in store for forgetting the Day of Reckoning! [Thus, it is]: We have not created Heaven and Earth and all that is between them without meaning and purpose. It is the surmise of those bent on denying the truth. But then, woe from the fire [of Hell] to all who deny the truth! (38:26-27)

The above statement, “We have not created Heaven and Earth...” appears in the Quran in several formulations. It connects here with the mention of the Day of Reckoning in the preceding verse. This

leads from a specific aspect of David's story to ethical teaching of broader import. Those bent on denying the truth reject the belief that the universe and human life are imbued with intrinsic meaning and purpose. This idea denies all individual moral imperatives and leads to spiritual blindness, hence, to suffering in the life to come.

PSALMS BOOK OF DIVINE WISDOM

Indeed, We endowed some prophets more highly than others - just as We bestowed upon David a book of divine wisdom [in token of Our grace]. (17:55) We caused the mountains to join David in extolling Our limitless glory, and likewise, the birds: for We can do [all things]. And We taught him how to make garments [of God-consciousness] for you, [O men], so that they might fortify you against all that may cause you to fear: but are you grateful [for this boon]? (21:79-80)

Above is a reference to David's Psalms, or “the book of divine wisdom.” It has outlived his earthly glory. Likewise, they call upon all nature to extol God's glory: “*The seven heavens extol His limitless glory and the earth, and all that they contain*” (17:44). Or “*All that is in the heavens and on Earth extols Allah's boundless glory*” (57:1). The primary significance of “garment,” here, is the metaphorical “garment of God-consciousness,” of which the Quran speaks in 7:26. The above verse expresses the idea that the Almighty taught David how to imbue his followers with that deep God-consciousness that frees men from all spiritual distress and fears, whether it be fear of one another or the subconscious fear of the unknown. The concluding rhetorical question, “But are you grateful [for this boon]?” implies that man does not fully realize—hence is not appreciative of—the spiritual bounty thus offered to him by God.

Chapter 12

SOLOMON AND QUEEN SHEBA

DAVID AND SOLOMON

Unto David, We granted Solomon [as a son—and] how excellent a servant [of Ours, he grew up to be]! (38:30) We granted [true] knowledge [spiritual insight] to David and Solomon [as well], and both used to say: “All praise is due to Allah, who has [thus] favored us above many of His believing servants!” And [in this insight] Solomon was [indeed] David’s heir. (27:15-16)

SOLOMON’S JUDGMENT IS MORE PROFOUND

And [remember] David and Solomon - [how it was] when both gave judgment concerning the field into which some people’s sheep had strayed by night and pastured therein. And [how] We bore witness to their decision: for, [though] We made Solomon understand the case [more profoundly], yet We vouchsafed unto both sound judgment and knowledge [of right and wrong]. (21:78-79)

The above story was already well-established in the ancient Arabian tradition. According to this story, a flock of sheep strayed at night into a neighboring field and destroyed its crop. The value of the sheep flock corresponds roughly to the damage extent. David awarded all sheep as an indemnity. David’s young son, Solomon, regarded this judgment as too severe, as the sheep represented the defendant’s entire capital. However, the damage was only temporary, involving no more than one year’s crop loss. Solomon suggested to his father that the field owner should have temporary possession and use of sheep (milk, wool, newborn lambs, etc.). Meanwhile, the field owner should take care of the damaged field until it returns to its former productivity. Then, both the field and the flock of sheep should revert to their original owners. In this way,

the plaintiff would be fully compensated for his loss without depriving the defendant of his capital. David realized his son's solution was better than his own and judged accordingly. In the Quran, God witnessed their decision. The fact that Solomon's judgment was more profound did not disprove the intrinsic justice of David's original judgment or deprive it of its merit.

USE OF LEGEND TO ELUCIDATE ETHICAL TRUTHS

The Quran often employs legends as a vehicle for allegories to convey a range of ethical truths. Many poetic legends associated with Solomon since early antiquity became part and parcel of Judeo-Christian and Arabian lore long before Islam. Although it is possible to interpret such passages rationally, this is unnecessary because they were so deeply ingrained in the people's imaginations to whom the Quran is addressed. Solomon's legendary wisdom and magic powers had acquired cultural reality, which made denial or confirmation of their mythical origin irrelevant. Within the Quran, the only thing relevant is the spiritual truth underlying each legend. The Quran uses them as a foil for the idea that God is the ultimate source of human power and glory. All human achievements, even though they border on the miraculous, are but an expression of His transcendental creativity.

THE VALLEY OF ANTS

And [one day] Solomon assembled his hosts of invisible beings, men, and birds. They were led forth in orderly ranks until they came upon a valley [full] of ants. An ant exclaimed: "O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you unknowingly!" He smiled joyously at her words and said: "O my Sustainer! Inspire me, so I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Thine with which Thou hast graced my parents and me, and I may do what is right [in a manner] that will please Thee;

and include me, by Thy grace, among Thy righteous servants!”
(27:17-19)

Invisible beings or jinn: for a full discussion, see volume seven, the chapter “Al-Ghayb.” Apart from 114:6, which contains the earliest Quranic reference to the jinn, the above is the oldest instance where this concept occurs in the personalized form of “invisible beings.” Solomon refers to his understanding and admiration of nature and his loving compassion for the humblest of God’s creatures as a divine blessing, and this is the Quranic moral of the legendary story of the ant.

SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

In the whole story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, symbolism and the legend are subtly intertwined, evolving into an allegory of the human soul’s awakening to spiritual values.

And he (Solomon) said: “O you people! We have been taught birds’ speech and given [in abundance] all [good] things. This is indeed a manifest favor [from Allah]!” (27:16) [One day] he [Solomon] sought in vain for [a particular one of] the birds; and so, he said: “How is it that I do not see the hoopoe? Or could he be absent? [If so] I will punish him or kill him unless he brings me a convincing excuse!” But [the hoopoe] tarried but a short while; and [when it came], it said: “I have encompassed [with my knowledge] something that you have never yet encompassed [with thine]—for I have come to you from Sheba with a tidings sure!”
(27:20-22)

The hoopoe is a colorful bird found across Afro-Eurasia, notable for its distinctive feather crown. The threat of “killing” the hoopoe is purely idiomatic and not taken literally. The above parable reminds us that the lowest being sometimes knows things that even Solomon, in all his wisdom, may be unaware of. This is a reminder

that should counteract the ever-present danger of conceit to which learned men, more than anyone else, are prone.

WORSHIP OF THE SUN

Hoopoe continued: “I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given [abundance] of all [good] things, and hers is a mighty throne. And I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah. Satan has made this doing appear good to them. And [thus] has barred them from the path [of Allah]. They cannot find the right way: [for they have come to believe] that they ought not to adore Allah— [although it is He] who brings forth all hidden in the heavens and on Earth and knows all you conceal and bring into the open. Allah, save whom there is no deity—the Sustainer, in awesome almightiness enthroned!” (27:23-26)

Their immoral impulses (the meaning of *Ash-Shaytan* in this context) had convinced them that they should not submit to the idea of man’s responsibility to a Supreme Being, who, by definition, is beyond human perception but should worship certain perceivable natural phenomena instead. However, God alone is responsible for the appearance and disappearance of the sun and other celestial bodies, which the Sabaeans—in common with almost all Semites of antiquity—used to worship (see the story of Abraham’s search for God).

SOLOMON’S LETTER TO QUEEN OF SHEBA

Said [Solomon], “We shall see whether you have told the truth or are one of the liars! Go with this letter and convey it to them and withdraw from them and see what answer they give.” [When the Queen read Solomon’s letter] she said: “O you nobles! A truly distinguished letter has been conveyed to me. It is from Solomon, and it says, ‘In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace: [Allah says:] Do not exalt yourselves against Me but come to Me in willing surrender!’” (27:27-31)

The information brought by the hoopoe is the very first link between the kingdoms of Sheba and Solomon. The hoopoe narrative makes it clear that the Sabceans exalt themselves against God by worshipping the sun. They are convinced they ought not to worship God. Hence, Solomon, being a prophet, is justified in calling upon them to abandon this blasphemy and surrender themselves to Him in the name of God.

KINGSHIP INHERENTLY UN-ISLAMIC

She added: “O you nobles! Give me your opinion on the problem I am now facing. I would never make a [weighty] decision unless you are present with me.” They answered: “We are endowed with power and mighty prowess in war, but the command is yours. Consider, then, what you would command.” Said she, “Whenever kings enter a country, they corrupt it, and turn the noblest of its people into the most abject. And this is the way they [always] behave?” (27:32-34)

When kings wrongfully seize and forcibly hold absolute power over their subjects, they spread corruption in the land. Thus, the Queen of Sheba rules out force as a suitable method for dealing with Solomon. Implied in her statement is the Quranic condemnation of the institution of kingship and all political powers obtained through violence, as they lead to oppression, suffering, and moral corruption.

SOLOMON REJECTS QUEEN SHEBA’S GIFT

She said: “Hence, I will send a gift to those [people] and wait for whatever [answer] the envoys bring back.” Now when [the Queen’s messenger] came unto Solomon, he said: “Do you people mean to add to my wealth? But Allah has given me is [so much] better than all He has given you! Only you would rejoice in this gift! You go back to them [who sent you]! For, [Allah says]: ‘We shall most certainly come upon them with forces which they will

never withstand and shall cause them to be driven from that [land of theirs], despicable and humbled!” (27:35-37)

God gave Solomon worldly wealth and faith, wisdom, and insight into realities hidden from others. The gift offended Solomon from Sheba, as they prized only material things and had no clue about spiritual values. As far as Solomon’s threat to Sheba is concerned, it is God who, through His Prophet, warns the people of Sheba of His coming upon them—i.e., punishing them—unless they abandon their blasphemous belief that they ought not to worship God. This interpretation finds considerable support in the sudden change from the singular in which Solomon speaks of himself to the majestic plural “We” in the above sentence.

BRING ME THE QUEEN OF SHEBA’S THRONE?

[When Solomon learned the Queen of Sheba was coming], he said [to his council]: “O you nobles! Which of you can bring me her throne before she and her followers come unto me in willing surrender to Allah?” Said a bold one of the invisible beings [subject to Solomon]: “I shall bring it to you before you rise from your council seat-for I am powerful enough to do it, [and] worthy of trust!” Answered he [Solomon] illumined by revelation: “[No] as for me—I shall bring it to you before the twinkling of your eyes ceases!” And when he saw it truly before him, he exclaimed: “This is [an outcome] of my Sustainer’s bounty, to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful! However, he who is thankful [to Allah] is grateful for his good, and he who is ingrate [should know that], my Sustainer is self-sufficient, most generous in giving!” (27:38-40)

The term throne means dominion or power. It appears Solomon intended to confront his guest with the symbol of her worldly power. This was to convince her that her throne is nothing compared to God's awesome almightiness. Solomon knew out of the revelation that he could bring the throne of Queen Sheba faster than

any magic could achieve. This was alluding to the symbolic nature of the forthcoming appearance of the throne. Solomon attributes his spiritual powers to God rather than vaingloriously to himself. The concept of time and space applies to creation, not to the Creator. The appearance of Queen Sheba's throne over more than 1500 miles in the blink of an eye can only be a miracle.

ALTERED THRONE

[And] he [Solomon] continued: “Alter her throne so that she may not know it as hers: let us see whether she allows herself to be guided [to the truth] or remains one of those who will not be guided.” And so, as soon as she arrived, she was asked: “Is your throne like this?” She answered: “It is as though it were the same!” [And Solomon said to his nobles: “She has arrived at the truth without any help from us], although it is we who have been given [divine] knowledge before her and have [long ago] surrendered ourselves unto Allah! [She recognized the truth] but she wanted to worship instead of Allah that kept her away [from the right path]. For, behold, she is descended from people who deny the truth!” (27:41-43)

Solomon intends to show the Queen her “throne”—or the image of her dominion as if it were inspired by faith in God and consciousness of moral responsibility. Whether the incredible miracle of her throne appearing far away guide her aright? Alter her throne so she cannot recognize it. This will determine whether she remains satisfied with perceiving only the outward appearance of things and happenings or endeavors to fathom their spiritual reality. Realizing that Sheba's people were motivated by luxury and worldly power.

When the Queen of Sheba saw her throne, the disguise didn't fool her. However, she expressed doubt that this throne was the same one she'd left behind. Doubt is the first step in all spiritual progress, thus Solomon's statement, “She has arrived at the truth without any

help from us.” The Queen of Sheba and her people worshipped celestial bodies, and she had grown up in idolatrous traditions, which made it difficult for her to find the right path. Considering this cultural background, Solomon points out that her awakening at the moment of her departure from her ancestral environment must be deemed most remarkable and praiseworthy.

FATHOMLESS EXPANSE OF WATER

[After a while] she was told: “Enter this court!” But when she saw it, she imagined it was a fathomless expanse of water, and she bared her legs. Said he “It is [but] a court smoothly paved with glass!” Cried she “O my Sustainer! I have sinned against myself by worshipping others but [Thee]. But [now] I have surrendered myself, with Solomon, to the Sustainer of all the worlds!” (27:44)

After witnessing a deep expanse of water, she bared her legs to wade into it or perhaps swim through it to brace the seemingly fathomless deep. It is a symbolic indication of the fear a human may feel when his search for truth forces him to abandon the warm, soothing security of his erstwhile social and mental environment to venture into the unknown realm of the spirit. Solomon points out that the fathomless expanse is not a dangerous, bottomless abyss as it appears at first glance. Still, in the firm, glass-clear light of truth—and with her perception of the ever-existing difference between appearance and reality, the Queen of Sheba takes the first step on her spiritual journey.

LOVE OF BEAUTIFUL HORSES

He [Solomon] would always turn to Us—[and even] when, towards the close of the day, nobly-bred, swift-footed steeds were brought before him, he would say, “I have come to love the love of all that is good because I bear my Sustainer in mind!”—[repeating these words as the steeds raced away,] until they were hidden by the veil [of distance—whereupon he would command],

“Bring them back to me!”—And would [lovingly] stroke their legs and their necks. (38:30-33)

The story of Solomon’s love of beautiful horses shows that all true love for God is reflected in one’s realization of and reverence for the beauty created by Him. Solomon would always think of God, as illustrated by the example given in the sequence.

THE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM OF SOLOMON

But [before this], indeed, We had tried Solomon by placing upon his throne a [lifeless] body; and thereupon he turned [towards Us; and] he prayed: “O my Sustainer! Forgive me my sins and bestow upon me the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after me: Thou alone art a giver of gifts!” (38:34-35)

The “body” upon Solomon’s throne is an allusion to his own body and to his kingly power, which was bound to remain “lifeless” so long as God-willed ethical values did not inspire it. It rested upon him to endow a spiritual kingdom that no one could inherit and was not exposed to envy or worldly intrigue.

THE SUBSERVIENCE OF INVISIBLE FORCES

Among the rebellious forces [which We made subservient to him], some dived for him [into the sea] and performed other works, besides, but it was We who kept watching over them. (21:82) The rebellious forces [that We made to work for him]—every kind of builder and diver—and others linked together in fetters. [And We told him:] “This is Our gift, for you to bestow freely on others, or to withhold, without [having to render] account!” And nearness to Us awaits him [in the life to come], and the most beautiful of all goals! (38:37-40)

The rebellious forces [which We made subservient to him] as a reward for his humility and turning away from worldly ambitions are implied in the prayer, “Forgive me my sins,” as mentioned in

verse 38:34 above. The rendering of Satans as “rebellious forces” inordinately proud or insolent—in this case, possibly a reference to subdued and enslaved enemies or, more probably, to unruly forces of nature Solomon did tame and utilize.

FOUNTAIN OF MOLTEN COPPER

We caused a fountain of melted copper to flow at his behest. [Even] among the invisible beings, some had [been constrained] to labor for him by his Sustainer’s leave—and whichever of them deviated from Our command, We would let him taste suffering through a blazing flame. They made for him whatever he wanted of sanctuaries, statues, and basins as [grand as] great watering troughs and cauldrons firmly anchored. [And We said:] “Labor, O David’s people, in gratitude [towards Me]—and [remember that] few are truly grateful [even] among My servants!” (34:12-13)

Fountain of molten copper is probably a reference to the many furnishings of copper and brass which, according to the Bible (2 Chronicles 4), Solomon caused to be made for his newly built temple. Jinn, or “invisible beings,” were subject to his will for this purpose. See 2 Chronicles 3:10-13, where statues (images) of Cherubim are mentioned. Also, in 4:2-5, describing a molten sea (i.e., basin) of huge dimensions, resting upon twelve statues of oxen, and meant to contain water for priests to wash in (4:6). The sanctuaries were the various halls of the newly constructed temple. “Labor, O David’s people, in gratitude:” These words, ostensibly addressed to David’s family, are a warning to all believers since all of them are spiritually David’s people. Few are truly grateful, even among God’s servants. For the truly indebted to God is only he who realizes his inability to render adequate thanks to Him.

SUBSERVIENCE OF THE WIND

Solomon [We made subservient to] the stormy wind, so that it sped at his behest towards the land We blessed. It is We who know everything. (21:81) And so, We made the wind subservient to him, so it gently sped at his behest. (38:36) And unto Solomon [We made subservient] the wind: its morning course [covered a distance of] a month's journey, and its evening course, a month's journey. (34:12)

The wind that blows toward the land is an allusion to the fleets of sailing ships, which brought untold riches to Palestine (the land We had blessed) and made Solomon's wealth proverbial.

SOLOMON WAS NOT A MAGICIAN

And follow [instead] that which the evil ones practiced during Solomon's reign. It was not Solomon who denied the truth, but those evil ones who denied it by teaching sorcery. [They follow] what has come down through the two angels in Babylon, Harut, and Marut—although these two never taught it to anyone without first declaring, "We are but a temptation to evil: do not, then, deny [Allah's] truth!" (2:102)

The expression *ash-shayatin*, rendered as "the evil ones," refers to human beings and evil, immoral impulses within a man's heart. This constitutes a Quranic refutation of the Biblical statement that Solomon was guilty of idolatrous practices (see 1 Kings 11:1-10). This declaration by Harut and Marut ("We are but a temptation to evil: do not, then, deny [God's] truth!") states man's moral duty to reject every attempt at sorcery. Whether it succeeds or fails, it aims to subvert nature's order instituted by God. As regards the designation of Harut and Marut, most Quran readings give the spelling *malakayn* ("the two angels") or *malikayn* ("the two kings"). Whichever of the two readings is followed, the lesson remains the same. Babylon was the home of magic arts, symbolized by

legendary kings Harut and Marut. With this legend, the Quran condemned every attempt at magic and sorcery and all preoccupations with the occult sciences in general.

They learn from these two how to create discord between a man and his wife. But whereas they can harm none thereby save by Allah's leave, they acquire knowledge that only harms themselves and does not benefit them. However, they know that whoever acquires this [knowledge] shall have no share in the good of the life to come. For, vile indeed is [art] for which they have sold themselves—had they known it! And had they believed and known Him, a reward from Allah would indeed have brought them good—had they but known it! (2:102-103)

The intent here is to warn man that any attempt to influence the course of events by means that—at least in the mind of the person responsible for it—have a “supernatural” connotation is a spiritual offense. Consequently, their author's spiritual status will be severely damaged.

THE DEATH OF SOLOMON

Yet [even Solomon had to die; but] when We decreed that he should die, nothing showed them that he was dead, except an earthworm that gnawed away his staff. And when he fell to the ground, those invisible beings [subservient to him] clearly showed that, had they understood the reality beyond their perception, they would not have continued [to toil] in the shameful suffering [of servitude]. (34:14)

Solomon died on his throne, leaning forward on his staff, and nobody knew his death for a long time. Consequently, the jinn, who had been constrained to work for him, continued to labor at the heavy tasks assigned to them. Gradually, however, a termite ate away Solomon's staff, and his body, deprived of support, fell to the ground. This story—only hinted at in its outline—is used here as an

allegory of human life's insignificance, inherent brittleness, the perishable nature and emptiness of all worldly might and glory.

Those invisible beings would not have continued to toil because they knew Solomon's sway over them had ended. Although the story relates to invisible beings, its moral lesson can be summarized in the statement that empirical knowledge cannot provide. Stress is laid here, firstly, on the limited nature of all empirical knowledge, including deductions and inferences based on observable or calculable phenomena. Secondly, it is impossible to determine correctly, based on such limited fragments of knowledge alone, what course of action would be right in each situation.

Chapter 13

ELIJAH (IDRIS OR ILYAS IN ARABIC), ELISHA (AL-YASA), AND JONAH (YUNUS)

After Solomon's death, a single nation was split into two kingdoms, Judah and Israel. The Hebrew prophet Elijah is mentioned in the Bible (1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 1-2) as living in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reigns of Ahab and Ahaziah—i.e., in the ninth century B.C.—and succeeded by Elisha (Al-Yasa in Arabic).

Elijah is a heroic figure in the Jewish tradition. He stood up to King Ahab, whose Phoenician wife introduced idol worship of Baal to the Jewish Kingdom. Elijah played a dominant role by judging every king by obedience to God's commandments and rejecting idol worship. By that standard, all Israel's kings failed, except for two kings of Judah. When Elijah returned from his desert sojourn, he ran across a young man named Elisha plowing a field. He took Elisha under his wing to be his successor. Some of the earliest Quran commentators assert that "Idris" is another name for Ilyas, the Biblical Elijah.

Call to mind, through this divine writ, Idris. He was a man of truth, a prophet, whom We exalted onto a lofty station. (19:56-57) [Remember] Ishmael and Idris and everyone who [like them] pledged himself [unto Allah]. They all were among those who were patient in adversity, and so We admitted them to Our grace; they were among the righteous! (21:85-86)

Regarding "whom We exalted," the same expression is used regarding Jesus (see 3:55 and 4:158). The phrase "pledged himself" (also in 38:48, just below) to do something signifies he became responsible for something or someone. It applies to all the prophets,

as each pledged himself unreservedly to God and accepted responsibility for delivering His message to man.

INVOKING BAAL AND FORSAKING GOD

Elijah [too] was indeed one of Our message-bearers when he spoke [thus] to his people: “Will you not remain conscious of Allah? Will you invoke Baal and forsake [Allah], the best of artisans—Allah, your Sustainer, and the Sustainer of your forebears of old?” But they gave him the lie. They will surely be arraigned [on Judgment Day], excepting only [those who were] Allah’s true servants; and him, We left thus to be remembered among later generations: “Peace be upon Elijah and his followers!” Therefore, do We reward the doers of good—for he was truly one of Our believing servants! (37:123-132)

The term Bal (conventionally spelled Baal in European languages) signified “lord” or “master” in all branches of old Arabic, including Hebrew and Phoenician. It was an honorific applied to the many male deities worshipped by the ancient Semites, especially in Syria and Palestine. In the Old Testament, this designation sometimes has the generic connotation of "idol worship"-a sin into which, according to the Bible, the early Israelites often relapsed.

ELISHA (AL-YASA)

Call to mind Ishmael and Elisha, and everyone who [like them] pledged himself [unto Us]: for each of them was truly pious! (38:48)

Elisha, or Al-Yasa, in Arabic, is the Biblical Prophet who succeeded Elijah.

JONAH (YUNUS IN ARABIC)

JONAH ABANDONED HIS MISSION

[Remember] him [Jonah] of the great fish—when he ran off in wrath, presuming that We had no power over him! (21:87) Jonah was indeed one of Our message-bearers when he fled like a runaway slave onto a laden ship. And then they cast lots, and he was the one who lost. (37:139-141)

According to the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament, God sent Jonah, who was a Hebrew, to the foreign city of Nineveh, Assyria, to preach against wickedness. The story of Jonah teaches that God's mercy is universal and not limited to any racial or religious group. In all three instances where Jonah's "great fish" is explicitly mentioned in the Quran, it carries the definite article *al*. It is because Jonah's legend was so widely known that every reference to the allegory of "the great fish" is presumed self-explanatory.

The laden ship alludes to Jonah's central, symbolic role. At first, his people disregarded his preaching, and he left them in anger, abandoning God's mission. The ship ran into a storm and was about to sink, and the mariners said to everyone, "Come and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us," a procedure to which Jonah agreed.

Jonah told them he fled from the Lord's presence. Because of this sin of his, they were all in danger of drowning. So, they took up Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging. The allegory of his temporary punishment and subsequent rescue and redemption is described below.

[And they cast him into the sea], whereupon the great fish swallowed him, for he had been blameworthy. And had he not been one of those who [even in the deep darkness of their distress can] extol Allah's limitless glory, he would indeed remain in its

belly until the Day when all shall be raised from the dead. (37:142-144) But then he cried out in the deep darkness [of his distress]: “There is no deity save Thee! Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! Verily, I have done wrong!” And so, We responded and delivered him from [his] distress; thus, We deliver all who have faith. (21:87-88) We caused him to be cast forth on a desert shore, sick [at heart] as he was and caused a creeping plant to grow over him [out of the barren soil]. (37:145-147)

The inside of the fish that swallowed Jonah symbolizes the deep darkness of spiritual distress at fleeing his prophetic mission. He would not have been rescued if he had not remembered God and repented. While on a desert shore, the creeping plant shaded and comforted him. Thus, rounding off the allegory of Jonah and the fish, the Quran points out figuratively, so characteristic of its style, that God, who can cause a plant to grow out of barren soil, can equally cause a heart lost in darkness to return to light and spiritual life. The story illustrates that since man was created weak (4:28), even prophets are not immune to all human failings.

ACCEPTANCE OF DIVINE GUIDANCE (AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE)

We sent him [once again] to [his people] with a hundred thousand souls or more, and [this time] they believed [in him]. (37:147) Alas, there has never been any community that attained faith [in its entirety] and benefited, except Jonah's people. When they believed, We removed from them the suffering of disgrace [which otherwise would have occurred] in this world. We allowed them to enjoy their lives during the time allotted to them. (10:98)

PERSEVERANCE IN THE MISSION (LESSON FOR THE PROPHET)

Bear, then, with patience, thy Sustainer's will, and be not like the great fish, who cried out [in distress] after giving in to anger. [And

remember:] Had not the grace of his Sustainer reached him, he would indeed have been cast forth upon that barren shore in disgrace. But [as it was] his Sustainer elected him and placed him among the righteous. Hence, [be patient] even though they who are bent on denying the truth would all but kill you with their eyes whenever they hear this reminder. And [though] they say, “[As for Muhammad] surely he is a madman!” [Be patient] for this is nothing else but a reminder [from Allah] to all humanity. (68:48-52)

In the verses above, Prophet Muhammad is encouraged not to despair or anger at the opposition shown to him by most of his contemporaries in Mecca. Instead, he is encouraged to persevere in his prophetic mission. “Had he not been one of those who, even in the deep darkness of their distress, can extol God’s limitless glory,” i.e., who always remember God and pray for His forgiveness. If not for God’s grace, Jonah would have died as a sinner, burdened with sin and unredeemed by repentance.

The Quran points out that no prophet was immediately accepted and followed by all his people. Consequently, many communities perished because most of their members refused to accept the change. The only exception in this respect is the people of Nineveh, who—after rejecting their Prophet Jonah—later responded to his call-in unison and were saved. The Bible mentions Jonah’s people, who alone among the communities of the past, heeded their Prophet before it was too late. It is a warning to readers of the Quran that a deliberate rejection of its message by “those against whom God’s word (of judgment) has come true” is bound to result in their spiritual doom and, consequently, in grievous suffering in the life to come.

PART 2

**THE NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS AND
THE UNITARIAN OR JEWISH
CHRISTIANITY**

Chapter 14

THE HOUSE OF IMRAN, ZACHARIAH, AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

LIMITED CONTACTS WITH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Interaction with Christians was limited during Islam's formative state. The Prophet had contact with only a few Christians in Mecca. No Christian community was close to Mecca or Medina, comparable to Medina's established Jewish community. The nearest Arabian Christian communities were on the southern border of Hijaz (Najranites), the northeastern border of Syria (Ghassanids), and the northwestern frontier of Persia (Lakhmids). All three communities belong to the Syrian Church. They believed in Monophysites, the Christological position that Christ's nature was divine only, a view later considered heretical by the Catholic and Orthodox churches. In his travel to Syria for the caravan trade, the Prophet encountered Christians. He was aware of Christianity and Judaism.

The Prophet was forty years old when his mission began in 610 with the revelation of the first five verses of the ninety-sixth surah (Al-Alaq, the germ-cell). The Prophet was emotionally overwhelmed, and his wife Khadijah consulted her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian who had translated part of Evangel into Arabic. When she finished telling him what Prophet Muhammad had seen and heard, Waraqah broke into these words: "Holy, Holy! He who dominates Waraqah's soul must be the Great Spirit that spoke to Moses. Muhammad must be the Prophet of this nation."

THE FIRST EXILE OF MUSLIMS TO CHRISTIAN ETHIOPIA (615)

Profoundly afflicted by his disciples' suffering at the hand of Quraysh, the Prophet advised them to seek refuge in the neighboring Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. This is because he had learned that the Christian king was a wise and just man who might be able to protect the nascent Muslim community. Less than a hundred Muslims secretly immigrated to Abyssinia. Once there, the Muslims presented an official letter from the Prophet. The letter states, "I have sent my cousin Jafer to you and a small group of Muslims. Receive them in hospitality." The Quraysh sent two ambassadors to King Negus to extradite these fugitives to Mecca. The principal charge was the abjuration of their old religion in favor of another. King Negus asked for the exiles and inquired whether their enemies were true. Jafar, son of Abu Talib and brother of Ali, acting as a spokesman for the group, spoke thus: "O King! We were in a state of immorality, worshipping idols, eating carrion, and committing all sorts of iniquity. We honored no relative and assisted no neighbor. The strong among us exploit the weak. Then God sent us a prophet, one of our people, whose lineage, truthfulness, loyalty, and purity were well known to us. He called us to worship God alone and repudiate all the stones and idols our ancestors, and we used to worship. Our Prophet commanded us always to tell the truth, remain true to trust and promise, assist the family, be kind to neighbors, abstain from blood and things forbidden, and avoid fornication, perjury, and false witness. He commanded us not to rob the orphan's property or falsely accuse the married woman. He ordered us to worship God alone and never associate any other being with Him, hold prayers, fast, and give charity (the five pillars of Islam were here enumerated and explained). We believed in him and what he brought to us from God and followed him in what he commanded and forbade. Our people, however, tried to sway us away from our religion and persecuted us. They also inflicted great suffering so that we might relapse into the immoral practices of old.

As they vanquished and berated us unjustly and made life intolerable for us in Mecca, we chose you and your country. We came here to live under your protection in justice and peace."

Pleased with what he had heard, King Negus asked, "Will you show me some revelations your Prophet claims came to him from God?" Jafar answered, "Yes!" and recited the nineteenth Surah Maryam [Mary] which explains Jesus' miraculous conception and birth. When Negus and the patriarchs heard this, they all wept until their beards were wet, and the bishops wept until their scrolls were wet. The king said, "These words must have sprung from the same fountainhead from which the word came to our master Jesus Christ." Negus asked them to tell him more about Jesus. Jafar ibn Abu Talib answered, "Our judgment of Jesus is exactly as that which was revealed to our Prophet; namely, that Jesus is the servant of God, His Prophet, His spirit, His command given unto Mary, the innocent virgin." Negus drew a line on the floor with his cane and said, "Between your religion and ours, there is no more difference than this line." At this, the King denied the extradition of Muslims to Mecca.

Thus, the Christians of Abyssinia warmly embraced the Muslims to protect them at a time when Islam and Muslims were very vulnerable. This prevented Muslims from being wiped out by Mecca's pagans. The Prophet never forgot this favor. When he was at the pinnacle of his power, he offered the same protection to the Christians of Najran and to the monks of Saint Catherine's Monastery.

NOBLE LINE OF DESCENT FROM IMRAN (AMRAM OF THE BIBLE)

Say [O Prophet]: "If you love Allah, follow me, [and] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. For Allah is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace." Say: "Pay heed unto Allah and the Apostle." Behold, Allah raised Adam, Noah, and the House of

Abraham, and the House of Imran, above all humanity, in one line of descent. And Allah was all-hearing, all-knowing (3:31-34)

The reference to the House of Imran serves as an introduction to Zachariah, Mary, John, and Jesus. They were all prophets from an Islamic perspective since God spoke to them. Almost all the prophets mentioned in the Quran were descendants of two or more of the patriarchs discussed above. The House of Imran comprises Moses and Aaron, their father Imran (Amram in the Bible). Aaron's descendants were the priestly caste among the Israelites. Hence, John the Baptist, both parents were of the same descent, and Jesus, whose mother, Mary was a close relative of John.

"**One line of descent**" alludes not merely to the physical descent of those prophets but also suggests that all of them were spiritually linked and believed in the same fundamental truth. Thus, the above passage logically follows verses 3:31-32, making God's approval contingent upon obedience to His chosen message-bearers.

BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

An account of the grace thy Sustainer bestowed upon His servant Zachariah: When he called out to his Sustainer in the secrecy of his heart, he prayed: "O my Sustainer! Feeble have become my bones, and my head glistens with gray hair. But never has O my Lord, my prayer unto Thee remained unanswered. "Now, behold, I am afraid of [what] my kinsfolk [will do] after I am gone, for my wife has always been barren. Bestow, then, upon me, out of Thy grace, the gift of a successor who will be my heir and an heir [to the dignity] of the House of Jacob, and make him, O my Sustainer, well-pleasing to Thee!" [Thereupon, the angels called out unto him]: "O Zachariah! We bring thee the glad tiding of [the birth of] a son whose name shall be John. [And Allah says,] 'Never have We given this name to anyone before him.'" [Zachariah] exclaimed: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when my wife has always been barren, and I have become utterly infirm through

old age?" Answered [the Angel]: "Thus, it is [but] thy Sustainer says, 'This is easy for Me - even as I have created thee aforesaid out of nothing.'"

[Zachariah] prayed: "O my Sustainer! Appoint a sign for me!" Said [the angel]: "Thy sign shall be that for three whole nights and days, thou wilt not speak unto men. Thereupon, he came out of the sanctuary to his people and signified to them [by gestures]. "Extol His limitless glory by day and by night!" [And when the son was born and grew up, he was told], "O John! Hold fast unto the divine writ with [all thy] strength!" For We granted him wisdom while he was yet a little boy, as well as, by Our grace, [the gift of] compassion and purity. He was [always] conscious of Us and full of piety towards his parents, and never was he arrogant or rebellious. Hence, [Allah's] peace was upon him when he was born, on the day of his death, and will be [upon him] on the day when he is raised to life [again]. (19:2-15)

A parallel description of John's birth is given in the 3rd chapter of the Quran:

In that self-same place, Zachariah prayed unto his Sustainer, saying: "O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me [too], out of Thy grace, the gift of goodly offspring, for Thou, indeed, hear all prayer." Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him: "Allah sends thee the glad tiding of [the birth of] John, who shall confirm the truth of a word from Allah, and [shall be] outstanding among men, and utterly chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous." [Zachariah] exclaimed: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when old age has already overtaken me, and my wife is barren?" Answered [the Angel]: "Thus it is Allah does what He wills." [Zachariah] prayed: "O my Sustainer! Appoint a sign for me!" Said [the Angel]: "Thy sign shall be that for three days thou wilt not speak unto men other than by gestures. And remember thy Sustainer unceasingly and extol His limitless glory by night and by day." (3:38-41)

Chapter twenty-one summarizes John's birth:

And [thus We did deliver] Zachariah when he cried unto his Sustainer: "O my Sustainer! Leave me not childless! But [even if Thou grant me no bodily heir, I know that] Thou wilt remain when all else has ceased to be!" And so, We responded unto him, and bestowed upon him the gift of John, having made his wife fit to bear him a child [and] verily, these [three] would vie in doing good works and call unto Us in yearning and awe; and they were always humble before Us. (21:89-90)

The father of **John the Baptist, Zachariah**, was a righteous priest and Prophet of God.

His office was in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. He managed Temple services and always remained steadfast in prayer to God. He anticipated his kinsfolk - who, like himself, were priests attached to the Temple - would be morally too weak to fulfill their duties with dignity and conviction (Razi) and thus perhaps unable to safeguard the future of Mary, whose guardian he was.

(Fakhruddin Razi, 26 January 1150 – 29 March 1210), The Sobriquet Sultan of the theologians was a Persian Islamic scholar and pioneer of inductive logic. He did various works in medicine, chemistry, physics, astronomy, theology, cosmology, philosophy.)

Zachariah's wife, Elisabeth, was Mary's cousin, Jesus' mother (Cf. Luke 1:36). The expression **Kalimah** ("word from God") is often used in the Quran to denote an announcement from God, a statement of His will, or His promise. The Arabic name **Yahya** (John) signifies "he shall live," i.e., he will be spiritually alive and remembered forever. God Himself had chosen this name for him, a singular distinction equivalent to a divine promise (kalimah). It is identical to the similar announcement conveyed to Mary regarding Jesus' birth. Zachariah was merely enjoined not to speak to anyone for three days and not struck dumb as in the New Testament narrative (Luke 1:20-22). Thus, the "sign" was purely spiritual and consisted

of Zachariah's utter self-abandonment to prayer and contemplation. Besides minor differences, Zachariah, John The Baptist, and Mary's stories are similar in the Quran and the New Testament Gospel of Luke. The statement, "This is easy for me," refers to God's unlimited power to bring into being a new chain of causes and effects.

In the 19th and 3rd Surah, Jesus follows the miraculous birth of John the Baptist, who was a precursor to Jesus. There is a similarity in these two miraculous births.

ZACHARIAH STONED TO DEATH

In 827 BCE, King Solomon dedicated the first Jewish Temple, called one of the World's Seven Wonders, for its extraordinary beauty. Later, the Kingdom of Israel practiced idolatry. God repeatedly sent prophets to admonish the Jews. Still, they refused to change their ways, choosing instead to deride these prophets as false messengers to discourage them with predictions of the Temple's destruction. The Prophet Zachariah chastised the nation for their sins, warning them of the grave punishments they would face if they did not change their ways. Rather than accept his rebuke, the nation stoned Zachariah to death in the Temple courtyard. (2 Chronicles 24:17-22)

BEHEADING OF JOHN, THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist is famous in Christianity for baptizing Jesus and paving the way for his ministry. The Gospels of Matthew (Matthew 14:1–12) and Mark (Mark 6:14–29) record that Herod Antipas had John the Baptist arrested and imprisoned after the preacher condemned the King's marriage to his wife, Herodias as illegal because she had previously been married to his brother, Philip. Herod Antipas initially resisted killing John because of his holy status. After Salome danced for him at his birthday party, he offered her anything she wanted.

Prompted by her mother, who resented John's judgment of her marriage, Herodias' daughter Salome requested John the Baptist's head on a platter, and her wish was granted.

Chapter 15

MARY AND JESUS

BIRTH OF MARY

When a woman [mother of Mary] of [the House of] Imran prayed: "O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow [the child] in my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!" But when she had given birth to the child, she said: "O my Sustainer! Behold, I have given birth to a female" - while Allah was fully aware of what she would give birth to, and [fully aware] that no male child [she might have hoped for] could ever have been like this female - "and I have named her Mary. And, verily, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed." And thereupon, her Sustainer accepted the girl-child with goodly acceptance, and caused her to grow up in goodly growth, and placed her in Zachariah's care. Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: "O Mary, whence came this unto thee?" She would answer: "It is from Allah; behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning." (3:35:37)

The male [child] Mary's mother had prayed for could not have been like this female - which implies that Mary's excellence would exceed far beyond any hopes her mother had ever entertained. There is no indication in the Quran or in any authentic Tradition that Mary's provisions were miraculous in origin. Mary's answer to Zachariah reflects her deep consciousness of God as the ultimate Provider.

As stated previously, Zachariah questioned the Angel about how he could have a son when he was old and his wife was barren. One of the purposes of relating John the Baptist's birth story was to convey that the miraculous birth does not confer divine status on that

person. A similar story of John the Baptist's and Jesus' births is mentioned in Luke's Gospel.

DRAWING OF LOTS

This account of something beyond thy perception We [now] reveal unto thee. For thou wert not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary's guardian. Thou wert not with them when they argued with one another as to which of them should be Mary's guardian. (3:44)

This parenthetical passage (3:44) is addressed to the Prophet. As narrated in the Quran, Mary's story is a direct outcome of revelation. It is, therefore, valid despite all the differences between this account and the scriptures regarded by Christians as authentic.

The phrase rendered above as "they drew lots" reads literally, "they cast their reeds"—a reference to an ancient Semitic custom, perhaps like divination by blunt arrows practiced by the pre-Islamic Arabs. The priests had drawn lots to choose who would care for Mary, dedicated to the Temple's service by her mother's vow. The pronoun "they" refers to the priests, of whom Zachariah was one. Mary's guardianship was entrusted to Zachariah, her relative, and a priest attached to the Temple.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE ANGEL OF REVELATION (GABRIEL)

And call to mind, through this divine writ, Mary. Lo! She withdrew from her family to an eastern place and kept herself in seclusion from them. We sent her Our Angel of revelation, who appeared to her in the shape of a well-made human being. She exclaimed: "Verily, 'I seek refuge from thee with the Most Gracious! [Approach me not] if thou art conscious of Him!" [The

Angel] answered: "I am but a messenger of thy Sustainer, [who says,] 'I shall bestow upon thee the gift of a son endowed with purity.'" Said she: "How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me? For, never have I been a loose woman!" [The Angel] answered: "Thus it is [but] thy Sustainer says, 'This is easy for Me; and [thou shalt have a son,] so that We might make him a symbol unto mankind and an act of grace from Us.'" (19:16-21)

Although born in Bethlehem, according to Mathew and Luke, Jesus was a Galilean from Nazareth. He was born to Mary in 4 BC. According to Matthew and Luke, Joseph was only his father legally. A parallel description of Jesus' birth is also given in the 3rd chapter of the Quran.

THE IMMACULATE OR SUPERNATURAL CONCEPTION OF JESUS

And lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Allah has elected you, and made you pure, and raised you above all women of the world. O, Mary! You remain truly devout to thy Sustainer and prostrate yourself in worship and bow down with those who bow down [before Him]." (3:42-43) Lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Behold, Allah sends thee glad tidings through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those drawn near unto Allah. And he shall speak unto men in his cradle, and as a grown man, and be of the righteous." Said she: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?" [The Angel] answered: "Thus it is Allah who creates what He wills: when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, 'Be,' and it is. (3:45-47)

AND [remember] her who guarded her chastity. We breathed in her Our spirit and caused her, together with her son, to become a symbol [of Our grace] to all people. (21:91)

When Jesus was conceived, his mother, Mary was a virgin, and she "was found to be with a child from the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35). Mary entered into seclusion to devote herself undisturbed to prayer and meditation. The "eastern place" may refer to an easterly chamber at the Temple, to which Mary's mother dedicated her life. The **angel of revelation appeared** before Mary, identified with the name Gabriel in the Gospel of Luke. Since—as implied in 6:9—mortals cannot perceive an angel in his true manifestation, God caused him to become visible to Mary "in the shape of a well-made human being," accessible to her perception. The term ruh often denotes "**divine inspiration.**" Occasionally, however, it is used to describe the medium through which such inspiration is imparted to God's elect: in other words, the Angel (or angelic force) of revelation. The angel's designation as ruh indicates that this category of beings is purely spiritual, without any physical element.

Christ, lit., "whose name shall be the Anointed" (al-Masih) derives from the Hebrew Mashiah, "the anointed," a term frequently applied in the Bible to the Hebrew kings, as their accession to power was consecrated by a touch of holy oil taken from the Temple. This anointment appears to have been so important a rite among the Hebrews that the term "the anointed" became synonymous with "king" over time. The honorific "the anointed" was applied to Jesus in his lifetime. This designation is correctly translated as Christos in the Greek Gospels (a noun derived from the Greek verb chriain, "to anoint"). In this form, "the Christ" is the designation al-Masih, which has achieved currency in all Western languages.

The expression "those **drawn near to God,**" is mentioned in **56:10-12: *But the foremost shall be [they who in life were] the foremost [in faith and good works]: they who were [always] drawn close unto Allah! In gardens of bliss [will they dwell].***

"**A symbol for mankind,**" one of the several meanings of the term **ayah** is "**sign**" or "a symbol." However, the sense in which it is

most used in the Quran is "a divine message." Hence, its application to Jesus may mean that he was destined to become a vehicle of God's message to man—i.e., a prophet—and thus, a symbol of God's grace. **"He but says onto it, 'Be'—and it is."** In the context of Mary's story in Al Imran, the announcement made to her, and the parallel one to Zachariah, is meant to stress God's unlimited power of creation. In both cases, His power to create the circumstances in which His will manifests itself. Thus, it brings about any event, however unexpected or improbable it might seem at the time of the announcement.

THE AGONY OF NORMAL CHILDBIRTH

And in time, she conceived him, and then she withdrew to a far-off place. And [when] the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree, she exclaimed: "Oh, would I have died ere this, and had become a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!" Thereupon [a voice] called out to her from beneath that [palm-tree]: "Grieve not! Thy Sustainer has provided a rivulet [running] beneath thee. And shake the palm tree trunk towards thee: it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon thee. Eat, then, and drink, and let thine eye be gladdened! And if thou meet any human being, convey this unto him: 'Behold, abstinence from speech have I vowed unto the Most Gracious; hence, I may not speak today to any mortal.'" (19:22-26)

And [We have propounded another parable of God-consciousness in the story of] Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity. Whereupon We breathe Our spirit into [her womb]. And who accepted the truth of her Sustainer's words and [thus] of His revelations – and was one of the truly devout. (66:12) They utter an awesome calumny against Mary, while refusing to acknowledge the truth. (4:156)

In ancient Semitic usage, a person's name was often associated with a famous ancestor or founder of the tribal line. Since Mary belonged

to the priestly caste and hence descended from Aaron, Moses' brother, she was called a "**sister of Aaron.**" Similarly, her cousin Elisabeth, Zachariah's wife, is spoken of in Luke 1:5 as one of Aaron's "**daughters.**" The expression "**breathe Our spirit**" used here concerning Mary's conception of Jesus is the same expression in three other places concerning the creation of man in general—namely in 15:29, 38:72, and 32:9. God "breathes His spirit" into every human being, endowing them with life.

Mary's description as "one who **guarded her chastity**" stresses her complete abstinence from any unlawful or morally reprehensible act. It serves as a rejection of the slander that Jesus' birth resulted from an illicit union.

PARTHENOGENESIS

Parthenogenesis is when an egg becomes an embryo without male fertilization. It has been observed in about 70 animal species but not in human beings. Parthenogenesis in humans never produces viable embryos. The Gospel and the Quran describe Jesus' conception are identical: supernatural or miraculous.

JESUS SPOKE IN A CRADLE (IN DEFENSE OF HIS MOTHER)

And in time, she returned to her people, carrying the child with her. They said: "O Mary! You have, indeed, done an amazing thing! Your father was not a wicked man, nor was your mother a loose woman!" Thereupon, she pointed to him. They exclaimed: "How can we talk to one who [as yet] is a little boy in the cradle?" (19:27-29) And he [Jesus] shall speak unto men in his cradle, and as a grown man, and shall be of the righteous." (3:46)

"He shall speak to men" alludes to the prophetic wisdom that inspired Jesus from a very early age. Although the Quran mentions that Jesus would "speak unto men while still in his cradle"—i.e.,

would be imbued with wisdom from his early childhood—the above verses can be understood literally as a supernatural event or in the figurative sense, projecting the shape of things to come.

A LOFTY PLACE IN PARADISE

We made the son of Mary and his mother a symbol [of Our grace] and provided both with an abode in a lofty place of lasting restfulness and unsullied springs. (23:50)

The expression "unsullied springs" or "running waters" signifies and symbolizes the spiritual purity associated with paradise, the "gardens through which running waters flow."

JESUS AND PURITY

And lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Allah has elected you, made you pure, and raised you above all the women of the world. (3:45) By Our grace, [the gift of] compassion and purity; and he [John] was [always] conscious of Us (19:13) "I shall bestow upon thee the gift of a son [Jesus] endowed with purity." (19:19)

The Quran declares not only Jesus but also John the Baptist and Mary as "pure." Those Christians who believe Jesus was Allah cite verse 19:19 as proof that Jesus was sinless. They ignore that the same Quran declares Mary and John the Baptist "pure." Purity does not translate into sinlessness. The famous incident in the New Testament, where Jesus called the woman of Canaan "dog." Such a racial slur indeed is a sin. Only Allah is sinless, and all human beings are sinners.

Chapter 16

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPES

Pontius Pilate: Jesus' ministry and teachings are best understood in the political and religious conditions during his lifetime. Palestine, in Jesus' day, was part of the Roman Empire. During Jesus' public career, the Roman prefect was Pontius Pilate, a minor Roman aristocrat. (Prefect is a magisterial title of varying definitions but essentially refers to the leader of an administrative area.) The prefect did not directly govern this area. Instead, he relied on local leaders. The prefect and his small army lived in the predominantly gentile city of Caesarea, about two days' march from Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast. They came to Jerusalem only to ensure peace during pilgrimage festivals—when huge crowds and patriotic themes sometimes combined to spark unrest or uprisings.

Caiaphas: A Jewish high priest who governed Jerusalem on a daily basis, assisted by a council of Jewish leaders. Caiaphas held the high priest's office during Jesus' ministry. The high priest had the difficult task of mediating between the remote Roman prefect and the local populace. This populace was hostile toward pagans and wanted to be free of foreign interference. His political responsibility was to maintain order and ensure tribute payment.

THE JEWISH SECTS

Many prominent Jewish religious groups differed in several ways:

1. The **Scribes** knew the Law and could draft legal documents such as contracts for marriage, divorce, loan, inheritance, etc.
2. The **Pharisees** had the reputation of being the most precise interpreters of the Law, and they believed in the resurrection of the dead. They also relied on the non-biblical “traditions of the fathers.”

Like the scribes, the Pharisees were likewise well-known legal experts, hence the partial overlap of these two groups. Most scholars also believe the Pharisaic movement later developed into the rabbinic Judaism of today. The Pharisees are often portrayed in the Gospels as hypocritical, concerned more with the outward show than sincere faith, “for they preach, but they do not practice” (Matthew 23:3; see also 23:4–5, 25–28).

3. **Sadducees:** Many aristocratic priests, as well as some prominent laymen, were Sadducees. They rejected the fathers’ traditions and denied the resurrection, which had recently entered Jewish thought from Persia and was accepted by most Jews in the first century. The Sadducees were apparently of the elite, wealthy class, closely allied with the high priestly families, and tied to Roman rule in Palestine. With time, the Sadducees disappeared from history.

JESUS MINISTRY

BAPTISM OF JESUS

And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Mark 1:9-11)

Jesus' public ministry began when he was baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-28). Why did Jesus receive John's baptism—a symbol of washing away sin and spiritual purification?

Matthew found it embarrassing that Jesus received John's baptism of repentance. Thus, he had John protest the baptism and claim that Jesus should instead baptize him (Matthew 3:13-17); however, this objection is not noted in Mark or Luke.

THE JEWISH CONCEPT OF THE SON OF GOD

The phrase “Thou art my beloved son” or “son of God” in the Hebrew Bible has many possible meanings, referring to angels, humans, or even all humanity. It was sometimes used for the expected Messiah figure. It also denotes a human judge or ruler (Psalm 82:6) and “children of the Most High.” In a more specialized sense, “son of God” is a title applied only to the real king over Israel (II Samuel 7:14), with reference to King David and those of his descendants who carried on his dynasty (Psalm 89:27-28). In the Jewish interpretation of the Gospels, Jesus' status as “son of God” corresponds to a pious holy man who performs miracles and exorcisms by divine intervention. Indeed, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the term Son of God is used in a similar sense.

THE MEANING OF MESSIAH

During his lifetime, many Jews in Palestine believed Jesus was the Messiah. The term Messiah does not equate with divinity. Christ, lit., whose name shall be the Anointed (al-Masih): the designation al-Masih is derived from the Hebrew Mashiah, “the anointed” - a term frequently applied in the Bible to Hebrew kings. By Jesus' death in 30 CE, Jews were passionate monotheists. Nobody expected the Messiah to be a divine figure but an ordinary, if privileged, human being.

APOCALYPTIC PROPHETS

In his mid-thirties, Jesus had a short public career, perhaps less than one year, during which he attracted considerable attention. The main message of apocalyptic preachers was that the end of history was near. God would shortly intervene to overthrow the evil Roman Empire and establish His rule on earth. John the Baptist, Jesus and his disciples believed these end-time events would occur in their lifetimes.

Jesus and John the Baptist believed that evil forces ruled the world through Satan and demons. God of good and his angels will soon intervene and defeat the satanic forces and usher in God's Kingdom. God was soon to send a cosmic judge from heaven, the Son of Man, who would set up God's Kingdom on earth. Jesus will be the king of this kingdom, and his twelve disciples will serve under him.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

While the Gospels agree that Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, they offer different versions of his view of that Kingdom. One is that the Kingdom of God exists in heaven and that individuals may enter it upon death (Mark 9:7). The parable that the Kingdom is like yeast that gradually leavens the entire loaf (Matthew 13:33) indicates that Jesus may have understood the Kingdom of God to begin in the present. Statements about the Kingdom being partially present on earth do not negate the eschatological nature of Jesus' message. At the end of time, the Kingdom would come to earth in its full power and glory. At this time, God's will would be done "on the earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the Kingdom of God; He predicted the destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:2) and possibly its rebuilding (Mark 14:58); he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, symbolizing his kingship (Mark 11:4-8); Matthew 21:1-11); see Zachariah 9:9 for the symbol. He had a final meal with his disciples in which he said he would "drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:25)

JESUS AND THE TORAH

OBSERVING SABBATH

One Sabbath, Jesus was walking through the grain fields. As his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is

unlawful on the Sabbath?” — Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:23-24, 27)

“And [I have come] to confirm the truth of whatever remains of the Torah, and to make lawful unto you some of the things which [aforetime] were forbidden to you. And I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer; remain, then, conscious of Allah, and pay heed unto me. (Quran 3:50) And know that the observance of] the Sabbath was ordained only for those who held divergent views about him [Abraham], but Allah will judge between them on Resurrection Day about all on which they differ. (Quran 16:124)

Jesus had the authority to change the laws of the Torah. The designation “apostle” (rasul) is applied to bearers of divine revelations, which introduce a new doctrinal system or dispensation. Jesus was an apostle, and the statement, “make lawful unto you some of the things which [aforetime] were forbidden,” is in tune with the changes he made to the Law of Sabbath.

Why was the Sabbath made for man? The Biblical explanation is that the Sabbath was for man’s benefit. He can rest from toil, from the cares and anxieties of the world. This will allow him to turn his attention away from earthly concerns and direct it to eternity.

The Quranic version of the Sabbath imposition on the Children of Israel, and all manner of other severe restrictions and rituals, was a form of punishment. The various religious laws imposed on them test their willingness to surrender to God and obey Him. This enables them to grow spiritually and socially according to God's law of evolution. Whether in Judaism or Islam, all God-imposed rituals are only a means to achieve spiritual discipline and self-control. In the end, on Resurrection Day, God will literally inform you where you differ.

OBSERVING JEWISH LAW

Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but fulfill them. For truly I tell you until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. So then, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do likewise will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven; but whoever practices and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘Do not murder’ and ‘Anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. So, if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. (Matthew 5:17-24)

The smallest letter represents the minute details of the Law. The Law is fulfilled when it is fully obeyed and what it demands is thoroughly carried out. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men to do so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. This seems to imply that a person who breaks the minor commandments and thus commits minor sins will still enter the kingdom of heaven. An offering at the altar must be postponed until any unforgiven offense against a fellow man has been made right. The rights of a human being supersede the duties man owes to God; a concept consistent with Quranic teachings.

Jewish Law is the focus of many passages in the gospels. Jesus repeatedly insisted that he uphold and fulfill the Jewish scriptures, not contradict them. Jesus admonished his followers to observe the Law unwaveringly. Not only does Jesus insist on obeying the laws of Torah, but he further added that the observance of the Law should not be only external but should also be internal. He argued that the whole of the Law could be summed up in the maxim commonly called the **Golden Rule**:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Jesus made some common-sense exceptions to the rigid Law and had a different explanation of some of the Laws than the other Jewish leaders had. In the gospels, the Pharisees are often called hypocrites. What Jesus meant by righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20) was a thoroughgoing effort to obey the revealed will of God according to its innermost intent. Not because every item was explicitly commanded or could be logically deduced from the sacred text but because one’s conscience and judgment responded to the underlying principle of it all. The Pharisees’ method of interpretation tended to produce a legalistic emphasis on the letter of the Law. Their elaborate casuistry (deductive reasoning) was the opposite of Jesus’ direct penetration to the Law’s essential spirit and principle. He repudiated the tendency of the scribes and Pharisees to become absorbed in trifles, their failure to put first things first. What is called into question is their whole approach to interpreting the Law. Jesus was no less devoted to the Law of Moses than they were. However, he rejected the oral law as a mere “tradition of men” (Mark 7:8-9; Matthew 15:3). He told the Pharisees and scribes that they were “The making void the word of God” by their tradition (Mark 7:13; Matthew 15:6).

DIETARY RESTRICTIONS

Jews are not allowed to eat carnivores, rodents, insects, pork, and shellfish (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), and the last two

prohibitions set them apart from other people. According to Mark 7:19: Jesus “declared all foods clean.” Peter seems to have first learned of this after Jesus’ death through a “heavenly revelation” (Acts 10:9-16). Jesus did not, during His lifetime, oppose the Torah’s dietary laws.

PAUL’S AND JESUS’ CONTRADICTIONARY STANCES

Paul’s teachings that gentiles converting to Christianity did not have to follow the laws of the Torah contradicts Jesus’ teachings. The wordings of Jesus are so clear and straightforward that it does not leave any wiggle room. Christian apologists have advanced complicated and sometimes incomprehensible explanations to harmonize Paul’s and Jesus’ contradictory stances regarding the sacred Law of the Torah.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND NEIGHBORS

You have heard it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You have heard it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. In that way, you will be acting as the true children of your Father in Heaven. For He gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. Be perfect; therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38-48)

My favorite passage of the Bible. Jesus of Nazareth uttered revolutionary words that we should love our enemies to the point of blessing them. Imagine if all the people started loving their enemies; there would be peace the world has never seen. The concepts Jesus taught are as radical today as they were two thousand years ago because they are counterintuitive to our divisive human nature and humanity's historic compulsion to be at war with itself. Jesus gave the reason for loving one's enemy—it is God who causes His sun to shine upon the good and the bad and who pours down His rain upon the just and the unjust. The radical idea of reconciliation taught by Jesus was later reiterated in the Quran. Loving your enemies means praying for them, blessing them, doing good to them—in short, returning good for evil.

JESUS AND MIRACLES

His commission is an enabling act. He performed miracles as proof. Jesus heals the sick, but also works miracles in the cradle. This echoes the story in the Gospel of the Infancy, of which a Coptic copy is extant. In the first century, healers and miracle workers were not considered superhumans.

Jesus himself granted that others could perform miracles, such as exorcisms, regardless of following him. (Matthew 12:27; Mark 9:38-41; 6:7) In his day, miracles were proof neither of divinity nor messiahship and at most, they could validate an individual's message or way of life. Jesus asked for no rewards for his miracles and begged the people not to mention these powers of his. The reason for his dislike of being known as a miracle worker was beyond being pestered to give exhibitions to satisfy curiosity; it diverted attention from his message.

HEALING OF A SHRIVELED HAND

And a man with a shriveled hand was there. Searching for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it

lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep? Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Then he told the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So, he stretched it out, and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees plotted how to kill Jesus. (Matthew 12:11-13)

HEALING OF LEPROSY

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:2-3)

According to Jewish law, if a person touched someone who was leprous, they would become unclean.

HEALING OF A CANAANITE CHILD

Now Jesus withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon, and there a Canaanite woman came to him and cried. “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; a demon severely possesses my daughter.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples begged him, “Send her away, for she is crying after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the woman knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” “It is not fair,” he answered, “to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

This Palestinian woman had a brilliant comeback, and she turned the table against Jesus.

She said, “Yes, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” “O woman, Jesus answered, “Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed (Matthew 15:21-28).

As a Jew and a human being, Jesus displayed his deep-seated prejudice and hatred for the gentiles. It is not befitting for a holy man to display utter contempt by hurling a racial slur, calling a Canaanite woman “dog.” Bernard Shaw, referring to the above incident in *Androcles and the Lion*, wrote, “She melted the Jew out of him and made Christ a Christian. It is somehow one of the most touching stories in the gospel, perhaps because the woman rebukes the prophet by a touch of her own finest quality.”

THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM “CHRISTIAN”

There is no statement or implication in the New Testament that Jesus promoted, began, or intended to start any religion. The book of Acts reports that Jesus' followers were called

"Christians," but this was a term of derision by Antioch's pagans. Jesus' disciples called themselves “followers of the way.” Jesus did not convert his followers from Judaism to Christianity. Neither Jesus nor his followers ever advocated conversion from one religion to another.

Jesus was a strict monotheist, as were his followers. He was a practicing Jew who followed the Torah and added and refined the laws. Jesus was a devoted and accomplished Rabbi who knew the Torah inside out. The first Christians saw Jesus as a new Moses, a new Joshua, the founder of a new Israel. They recognized Jesus as a prophet—and, therefore, as no more than a created human being.

CONCLUSION

The most important commonality between Islam and Christianity is the teachings of Jesus. Most of the teachings of Jesus are consistent with Islamic teachings. At least, Muslims and Christians can agree on what Jesus said, what he stood for, and what he must teach us even today. From an Islamic point of view, more important is how Jesus lived a righteous life, which serves as a reminder to the rest

of us to follow his example. Whether or not he died on the cross or exactly how you frame the nature of his identity may be critical for Christian theology, but they are separate and theoretical issues.

Chapter 17

THE PROBLEMS WITH THE FOUR GOSPELS

The four different versions of Jesus' earthly ministry by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, and the differences between them may confuse readers. The purpose of relating the Gospels' potential inaccuracies is not to diminish their importance but to understand their limitations. The New Testament is one of the bedrock texts that molded and inspired Western Civilization, and its importance cannot be overstated. The Gospel accounts can be compared with Hadith literature, where Prophet Muhammad's sayings were recorded long after his death. Despite its inherent inaccuracies, Hadith literature is still considered second only to the Quran.

FROM ORAL TRADITIONS TO WRITTEN GOSPELS

1. ORAL TRADITIONS AND PROTO-GOSPEL

The stories and sayings of Jesus passed on largely as separate self-contained units and later, written collections of miracle stories, parables, sayings, etc. Written proto-gospels preceded and served as sources for the gospels. It is believed that Mark was the first gospel written and served as the source for Matthew and Luke's Gospels.

2. Q DOCUMENT

Matthew and Luke also share a large amount of material not found in Mark originated from a lost source called the Q Document (from "Quelle," the German word for "source.") Most of these other passages were sayings of Jesus.

3. M AND L SOURCE

Matthew and Luke contain some material unique to each, called the M source (Matthew) and the L source (Luke).

WHAT IS INJIL (GOSPEL) IN THE QURAN?

And, indeed, [to the same end] We sent forth Noah and Abraham [as Our message-bearers] and established prophethood and revelation among their descendants, and some of them were on the right way, but many were iniquitous. And thereupon We caused [other of] Our apostles to follow in their footsteps; and [with time] We caused them to be followed by Jesus, the Son of Mary, upon whom We bestowed the Gospel; and in the hearts of those who [truly] followed him, We engendered compassion and mercy. (Quran 57:26-27)

In Arabic, the Gospel or Injil is singular (not Gospels) and is mentioned eleven times in five Surahs. The Injil, a precursor to the four Gospels, represents Jesus' sayings—a direct revelation from God and not the inaccurate version described in the four Gospels.

Angel Gabriel addressed Mary: *“And He will impart unto thy son the book, (al-Kitab) wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel, and [will make him] an apostle unto the children of Israel.” (3:48-49)*

The word al-Kitab, or book, represents God’s revelation to Jesus, not a physical book. The Quran is also described as a book, but it was delivered orally to the Prophet Muhammad. The revelation vouchsafed to Jesus included both the Torah and the Gospel. However, the Torah was an earlier revelation described as “imparted to Jesus” because his prophetic mission was based on the Law of Moses, which was only confirmed and not abolished by the Gospel (cf. Matthew v, 17-19). The revelation and “wisdom” emphasize the divinely inspired philosophical aspects of the Gospel and, together with a more legalistic Torah, form a comprehensive religious text.

GOSPEL IN GREEK AND NOT IN ARAMAIC

Paul's letters and not the Gospels were the earliest Christian texts, written in AD 50, about twenty years after Jesus' death, before the Gospels of Mark and Matthew were written. Initially, highly educated authors wrote the Gospels (also from "good news" in Old English). However, Jesus' followers were generally uneducated peasants, and their language was Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew and Arabic.

ANONYMOUS GOSPELS SOURCES

All four Gospels were not eyewitness accounts and were not written in the first-person view. Very few of Jesus' actual words are recorded in the Gospels. The Gospel authors did not reveal their sources. The first full-length account of Jesus' life was St. Mark's Gospel, written until forty years after his death in AD 60-80, followed by Matthew, Luke, and John in AD 75-90.

POST-RESURRECTION PERSPECTIVE

Much of the material has been affected by later developments in the Churches founded by St. Paul. The Gospels were written from the post-resurrection perspective, a momentous event in Christianity's history, as they dealt with Jesus' earthly ministry from hindsight. By this time, historical facts had been overlaid with mythical elements, which expressed Jesus' meaning for his followers. This is the meaning the Gospels primarily conveys rather than a reliable, straightforward portrayal.

HISTORICAL JESUS OR THE HEAVENLY LORD

Not all the sayings and deeds in the gospels are reports of things Jesus said and did. After Jesus' death, early Christians prayed to him, and sometimes Jesus answered (2 Corinthians 12:8- 9, 1 Corinthians 2:13). These early Christians could not distinguish between "the historical Jesus" and "the heavenly Lord." Some

sayings heard in prayer almost certainly ended up in the Gospels as if uttered by Jesus during his lifetime.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree so closely that they can be studied together in parallel columns in a work called a synopsis. They are hence called the synoptic gospels.

John's Gospel is so different that it cannot be reconciled with the Synoptics, except generally.

1. In the Synoptics, Jesus' public career appears to have lasted less than one year since only one Passover is mentioned. John has three Passovers, implying a ministry of more than two years. John also describes several trips to Jerusalem, but only one is mentioned in the synoptics.

2. The most significant difference, though, appears in the synoptic Gospels. He speaks about the Kingdom of God in short aphorisms and parables, using similes and figures of speech, many drawn from agricultural and village life. Jesus rarely mentions eternal life.

3. In John, Jesus employs lengthy metaphorical discourses, where he is the main subject. He seldom mentions the Kingdom of God but regularly mentions eternal life.

4. In the synoptics, Jesus shows strong concern for the poor and sinners. In John, Jesus shows little concern for the poor and sinners.

5. In the Synoptics, he seldom refers to himself, and he refuses to provide a "sign" to prove his authority (Mark 8:11-12). In John's Gospel, his miracles are described as "signs" that support his authenticity. It comes close to declaring Jesus as God; such statements are absent in the synoptic Gospels. If he believed and preached, he was God; the synoptic Gospels would have recorded such a saying. Even the Gospel of John never categorically states

Jesus' precise words, "I am God." The Gospel of John represents today's orthodox Christianity, and Christian apologists frequently quote John's Gospel to prove the divinity of Jesus.

6. Jesus preaches repentance and forgiveness in the synoptics. In John, Jesus mentions repentance and forgiveness, only once (John 20:23)

7. **Historical accuracy:** Bart D. Ehrman, one of the distinguished New Testament scholars, writes in his book "How Jesus became God," "Nearly everyone agrees that even though these canonical Gospels are problematic as sources for the historical Jesus, they nonetheless do contain some historically accurate recollections of what he said, did, and experienced amid all the embellishments and changes." For a more detailed discussion, please read the tremendous scholarly work of Bart D. Ehrman, "How Jesus became God." However, John's Gospel is the least reliable historically as compared to the Synoptic Gospels, according to most New Testament scholars, many of them are Christians.

LATER ADDITIONS TO THE GOSPELS

- The final twelve verses were added later to Mark (16:9-20) to prove Jesus' resurrection.
- Verse 1 John 5:7 was inserted to bolster the claim of the Trinity.
- The Earliest Greek manuscripts show that the story of the adulterous woman in John 7:53-8:11 was not originally part of John's Gospel and was a later addition.

Chapter 18

JESUS OF THE QURAN

Jesus or Isa in Arabic is mentioned in the Quran more than twenty-five times. The Quran describes Jesus in the most exalted terms as righteous and pure. Jesus holds the distinction among all prophets in his supernatural birth and is referred to as Messiah more than ten times. It even accepts the Christian doctrine of his virgin birth. The Quran describes Jesus' immaculate birth as a miracle of God. This is like parting in the sea by Moses and many other miracles mentioned in the Bible and the Quran.

APOSTLE

Christ, Son of Mary, was but an apostle and all [other] apostles passed away before him. His mother never deviated from the truth, and they both ate food [like other mortals]. Behold how clear We make these messages unto them, and then behold how perverted their minds are! Say:” Would you worship, besides Allah, aught that has no power to harm or benefit you - when Allah alone is all-hearing, all-knowing?” (5:75-76)

AND LO! We did accept a solemn pledge from all the prophets - from thee, [O Muhammad], and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the Son of Mary. We accepted a most weighty solemn pledge from [all of] them. This was so that [at the end of time] He might ask those men of truth as to [what response] their truthfulness [had received on earth]. And He has prepared grievous suffering for all who deny the truth! (33:7-8)

Now when Jesus came [to his people] with all evidence of the truth, he said: “I have now come unto you with wisdom, [with Divine revelation] and to make clear unto you some of that on which you are at variance: hence, be conscious of Allah, and pay heed unto me. “Verily, Allah is my Sustainer as well as your

Sustainer; so, worship [none but] Him, this [alone] is a straight way!” (43:63-64)

The restrictive allusion to “some of that...,” etc., bears mostly on the realm of faith and morals. It does not have as much to do with the problems of his people’s worldly life.

And they say, “Be Jews” - or “Christians” - “and you shall be on the right path.” Say: “Nay, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.” Say: “We believe in Allah, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus; and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.” (2:135-136) And We vouchsafed unto Jesus, the Son of Mary, all evidence of the truth, and strengthened him with holy inspiration. (2:253)

Say: “We believe in Allah, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which their Sustainer has vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and all the [other] prophets: we make no distinction between any of them. And unto Him do we surrender ourselves.” (3:84)

Islam honors Jesus as a true apostle of God, limited to men like Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad. Apostles brought new dispensations in contrast to Prophets, who are responsible for enunciating ethical principles from existing dispensations.

The Quranic view coincides with early Christians who believed Jesus was God's Prophet sent to reform the Jews. Jesus said, ***“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24)***

Jesus saw his teachings not as a departure from the Judaic tradition but as an unbroken continuation of that tradition—just as Muhammad saw the Quran and his teachings as a continuation of the existing scriptures. Islam and Christianity are not simply overlapping ideas or merely compatible, but they are one continuum in the most central sense.

TEACHINGS OF JESUS ACCORDING TO THE QURAN

We vouchsafed unto him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever remained of the Torah, and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious. Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein: for they who do not judge in the light of what Allah has bestowed from on high—it is they, they who are truly iniquitous! (5:46-47)

SOARING DESTINY

[Jesus said]: “I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer. I shall create for you out of clay, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breathe into it so that it might become [your] destiny by Allah’s leave; and I shall heal the blind and the leper and bring the dead back to life by Allah’s leave, and I shall let you know what you may eat and what you should store up in your houses. Behold, in all this, there is indeed a message for you if you are [truly] believers. (3:49)

Lo! Allah will say: “O Jesus, Son of Mary! Remember the blessings I bestowed upon thee and thy mother-how I strengthened thee with holy inspiration, so that thou couldst speak unto men in thy cradle, and as a grown man. I imparted unto thee revelation and wisdom, including the Torah and the Gospel. How by My leave thou didst create out of clay, as it were, the shape of [thy followers’] destiny, and then didst breathe into it so that it might become, by My leave, [their] destiny. And how thou didst

heal the blind and the leper by My leave, and how thou didst raise the dead by My leave. And how I prevented the children of Israel from harming thee when thou camest unto them with all evidence of the truth, and [when] those of them who were bent on denying the truth said, ‘This is nothing but deception!’” (5:110)

“The shape of [your] destiny,” lit., “something like the shape of a bird, and then I shall breathe into it so that it might become a bird...” The noun tayr is a plural of tair (flying creature or bird), which often denotes fortune or destiny, whether good or evil. Thus, in the parabolic manner so beloved by him, Jesus intimated the children of Israel that out of the humble clay of their lives, he would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny. And that this vision, brought to life by his God-given inspiration, would become their real destiny by God’s leave and the strength of their faith. “What you may eat and what you should store,” i.e., “what good things you may partake of in the life of this world, and what good deeds you should lay up as a treasure to come.”

DISCIPLES OF JESUS

And when Jesus became aware of their refusal to acknowledge the truth, he asked: “Who will be my helpers in Allah’s cause?” The white-garbed ones replied: “We shall be [thy] helpers in Allah’s cause! We believe in Allah and bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves unto Him! O our Sustainer! We believe in what Thou hast bestowed from on high, and we follow this Apostle; make us one, then, who bear witness [to the truth]!” And the unbelievers schemed [against Jesus]; but Allah brought their scheming to naught: for Allah is above all schemers. (3:52-53)

THE REQUEST OF DISCIPLES FOR A HEAVENLY REPAST

And [remember the time] when I inspired the white-garbed ones [the disciples of Jesus]: “Believe in My Apostle and Me!” They

answered: “We believe; and bear Thou witness that we have surrendered ourselves [to Thee].” [And] lo, the white-garbed ones said: “O Jesus, Son of Mary! Could thy Sustainer send us a repast from heaven?” [Jesus] answered: “Be conscious of Allah, if you are [truly] believers!” Said they: “We desire to partake thereof so that our hearts might be fully at rest, and we might know that you have spoken the truth to us, and we might be of those who bear witness to it!” Said Jesus, the Son of Mary, “O Allah, our Sustainer! Send us a repast from heaven. It shall be an ever-recurring feast for us—for the first and last of us—and a sign from Thee. And provide us our sustenance, for Thou art the best of providers!” Allah answered: “I [always] do send it down to you: and so, if you should henceforth deny [this] truth, on him, will I inflict suffering, like of which I have never [yet] inflicted upon anyone in the world!” (5:111-115)

The word Maidah, the title of this surah, was the heavenly repast requested by the disciples. In religious terminology, God sends down every benefit that accrues to a man from heaven—that is, even if it comes into being through man’s efforts. The way the disciples have asked for the repast point to a request for a miracle. This would assure them of God’s acceptance of their faith. Lit., “I am sending it down to you” implies a continuous process of bestowal. The stress on God’s ever-recurrent sustenance explains His severity of condemnation of all who presume man is self-sufficient and independent.

BE A HELPER TO MUHAMMAD, LIKE JESUS' DISCIPLES

O you who have attained faith! Be helpers in the cause of Allah - even as Jesus, the Son of Mary said unto the white-garbed ones, “Who will be my helpers in Allah’s cause?” Whereupon the white-garbed [disciples] replied, “We shall be [thy] helpers [in the cause] of Allah!” (61:14)

This verse urges followers of Prophet Muhammad to help him in the cause of God, just like Jesus' disciples did.

REJECTION OF JESUS

Indeed, we vouchsafed Moses the divine writ and caused Apostle after Apostle to follow him. We vouchsafed Jesus, the Son of Mary, with all evidence of the truth, and strengthened him with holy inspiration. [Yet] is it not so that every time an apostle came to you with something not to your liking, you gloried in your arrogance. To some of them, you gave the lie, while others you would slay? (2:87) Those of the children of Israel who were bent on denying the truth had already been cursed by the tongue of David and Jesus, the Son of Mary? (Cf. Psalms lxxviii, 21-22, 31-33, and passim; also, Matthew xii, 34, and xxiii, 33-35.) This, because they rebelled [against Allah] and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right. They would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did. Vile indeed was what they were wont to do! (5:78-79)

During his lifetime and after his death, some Jews rejected Jesus altogether. They believed he was a “false prophet” and the product of a shameful, illicit union. The Jews who anticipated future redemption did not expect the end of the world. They believed God would intervene in human history and make the world perfect. Jews would live in the holy land, free from foreign dominance and in peace and prosperity. Many Jews, including John the Baptist, expected final judgment to precede this golden age. He taught that people should repent given its imminence (Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:3-9). God will restore the twelve tribes of Israel, including the ten lost tribes, and that Jesus shared this view is indicated by his call of the twelve disciples (Matthew 19:28).

WHY THE JEWS REJECT JESUS?

The Jewish understanding was that the Spirit of God would anoint the Messiah to serve in all three positions: Prophet, king, and priest. It would also affirm at least five things about the Messiah. At the end of the Jewish people's history, the Messiah will come from:

- 1) The house of David
- 2) Will establish God's Kingdom-an earthly kingdom.
- 3) The Anointed of the Lord will gather the tribes of the chosen people.
- 4) Gain sovereignty over the land of Israel.
- 5) He will establish a world kingdom of peace in Jerusalem.

Jesus disappointed the Jews' political expectations and did not let himself be a political Messiah. Since he could not establish a world kingdom of peace during his lifetime, many Jews rejected him.

Chapter 19

THE DEATH OF JESUS

OBSERVING PASSOVER IN JERUSALEM

In about the year 30 CE, Jesus and his disciples went to Jerusalem from Galilee to observe Passover. The holiday was meant to commemorate the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and liberation from foreign bondage. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, perhaps intending to recall Zachariah 9:9, which Matthew (21:5) quotes: ***“Your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey.”*** This touched off a demonstration by his followers, who hailed Jesus as either “Son of David” (Matthew 21:9) or “the one who comes in the name of Lord” (Mark 11:9).

REVOLT IN THE TEMPLE

Jesus taught and debated (Mark 12) and told his disciples that the Jewish Temple would be destroyed (Mark 13:1-2). He entered the Temple, where worshipers exchanged coins to pay the annual temple tax and bought pigeons for sacrifice. Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” (Mark 11:15-17), which led the chief priest and the scribes to plan to have him executed (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47). Later, Jesus and his disciples had a Passover meal. The following are the twelve disciples of Jesus: Peter and Andrew, the sons of John; James and John, the sons of Zebedee; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Jude, the son of James; Simon; and Judas Iscariot.

THE TRAITOR

Judas Iscariot, however, one of the twelve disciples betrayed Jesus to the authorities. After supper, Jesus took his disciples to the Mount of Olives to pray. While he was there, Judas led armed men sent by the chief priests to arrest him (Mark 14:43-52). Caiaphas asked Jesus if he was “the Christ, the Son of God.” According to Mark (14:61-62), Jesus said “yes” and predicted the arrival of the Son of Man. According to Matthew (26:63-64), he said, “You say so, but I tell you that you will see the Son of Man,” apparently implying the answer was no. According to Luke, he was more ambiguous: “If I tell you, you will not believe” and “You say I am” (22:67-70). Whatever the answer, Pontius Pilate had already decided that Jesus had to be crucified. In those times, crucifixion was a heinous form of the death penalty reserved for the lowest of criminals.

DEATH OF JESUS ACCORDING TO THE QURAN

BODILY DEATH OF JESUS

Lo! Allah said: “O Jesus! Verily, I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto Me, and cleanse thee of [the presence of] those bent on denying the truth; and I shall place those who follow thee [far] above those bent on denying the truth, unto the Day of Resurrection. In the end, unto Me, you all must return, and I shall judge between you regarding all on which you were wont to differ.” (3:55)

And as for those who are bent on denying the truth, I shall cause them to suffer a suffering severe in this world and in the life to come, and they shall have none to succor them; whereas unto those who attain faith and do good works, He will grant their reward in full: for Allah does not love evildoers.” This message do We convey unto thee, and this tiding full of wisdom. (3:56-58)

In the Surah nineteen, Jesus is describing his own death: "***Hence, peace was upon me on the day when I was born, and [will be upon me] on the day of my death, and on the day when I shall be raised to life [again]!***" (19:33).

John the Baptist death is also described in the same surah in almost identical words: ***Hence, [Allah's] peace was upon him on the day when he was born, and on the day of his death, and will be [upon him] on the day when he shall be raised to life [again].*** (19:15) It is clear from the verses that Jesus, like any human being, died of physical death. Many Muslims believe that Jesus was bodily taken to haven. John the Baptist was brutally slain, and his head was placed on the platter. His death is described in almost identical words as the death of Jesus.

MYSTERY OF CRUCIFIXION

And the unbelievers schemed [against Jesus]; but Allah brought their scheming to naught: for Allah is above all schemers. (3:54) Their boast [referring to the Jews], "We have slain the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, [who claimed to be] an apostle of Allah!" However, they did not slay him, nor did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them so. The people who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not slay him: No, but Allah exalted him to Himself—and Allah is indeed almighty, wise. (4:157-158)

CRUCIFIXION WAS A MYTH (commonly accepted explanation)

Muslim theologians almost unanimously believe that the above verse denies the crucifixion of Jesus period— an example of extremely rare consensus among these scholars. The Quranic phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum* is “but it only appeared to them (the Jews) as if it had been so.” In other words, the crucifixion of Jesus was a

myth that, over time, long after Jesus was gone, a legend had somehow grown up to the effect that he had died on the cross to atone for the original sin humanity is allegedly burdened.

THE JEWS DID NOT KILL JESUS

One thing is for certain: the Jews did not crucify Jesus. The unbelievers who plotted against Jesus were the Jews who refused to acknowledge Jesus as a prophet and attempted to destroy him. The Quran refutes their boasts that they killed Jesus Christ. The three pronouns “they” in 4:157—159 refer to the Jews. They, the Jews, did not slay or crucify him. It was Roman prefect Pontius Pilate who authorized the crucifixion. In other words, the Quran agrees with the Jewish view that the Messiah will not die the humiliating death on the cross. God will protect him no matter what.

Unfortunately, even today, “Christ-killer” is an epithet still hurled at Jews, a major cause of anti-Semitism, for the so-called crimes of their ancestors. Jews have been persecuted by Christians throughout history for killing God or committing deicide.

BASELESS LEGENDS

There are many fanciful legends believed by some Muslims that God substituted for Jesus a person closely resembling him (according to some accounts, that person was Judas), who was crucified in his place. Or Jesus survived the crucifixion and appeared in person to his followers. However, none of these legends have the slightest support in the Quran or authentic traditions and must be summarily rejected. They represent no more than confused attempts to harmonize the Quranic statement with the graphic description in the Gospels of his crucifixion.

JESUS WAS NOT TAKEN UP BODILY TO HEAVEN

Muslims have another misconception that Jesus was taken up bodily into heaven in his lifetime. The expression “God exalted him unto Himself” in the above verse denotes the elevation of Jesus to the realm of God’s special grace—a blessing in which all the Prophets partake. In verse 19:57, the verb *rafa nahu* (“We exalted him”) is used in relation to the Prophet Elijah. See 3:55 above, where God says to Jesus, “I will cause you to die and exalt you to Me.” Whenever God elevates a human, it always means honoring or exalting. “I shall judge between you regarding all on which you differ” refers to all who revere Jesus, i.e., the Christians, who believe him to be the Son of God, and the Muslims, who regard him as a prophet and those who deny him altogether, i.e., the Jews.

CONCLUSION

From all the Quran verses, we can draw the following conclusion: Some Jews, bent on denying the truth, conspired to kill Jesus but failed. Jesus died of physical death and was exalted to the realm of God’s special grace.

CRUCIFIXION SCENE IN THE BIBLE

According to Luke's gospel, there is a discussion between Jesus and the robbers in the Crucifixion scene. Jesus gave assurance that one of them would be with him in paradise, as well as the words, “Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit!”—Which contrasts with the cry of dereliction in Matthew and Mark (15:34: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) When evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, before the Sabbath, Jesus’ body was placed in a tomb. Taking down Jesus' body on the same day of his crucifixion and placing it in the tomb was not according to brutal Roman practices. It was customary to leave the crucified body on the cross for many days so that it could rot. Birds of prey and animals devour it. The desecration of carcasses and denying a

decent burial was part of crucifixion, meant to humiliate the dead victim and teach a lesson to future troublemakers.

RESURRECTION

When the Sabbath passed, Mary Magdalene and Mary, Jesus' mother, went into the tomb and found it empty. Later, allegedly, the resurrected Jesus appeared to some of his followers.

THE DEMISE OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY

Early Christianity was a widespread community that retained its Jewish roots, beliefs, and practices while adhering to Jesus as the Messiah. Unitarian Christianity viewed its mission as almost exclusively for Jews. One such group was the Ebionites. They followed Jewish laws and customs to retain Jewish identity. This is because Jesus was the Jewish messiah sent by God to the Jews to fulfill the Jewish laws. Their theological lineage can be traced to the early followers of Jesus. They believed one could be made right with God by following Christ's example, just as Jesus himself fulfilled the Law. After Jesus' death, unitarian Christians congregated in Jerusalem around Jesus' brother James' leadership.

The Siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE led to the dissolution of Jewish Christianity. Its teachings died out and later resurfaced in Islam. Most of Jesus' teachings, as documented in the Gospels, are consistent with Islamic teachings. If Jesus enters this world tomorrow, he will be much more comfortable in a Muslim home. Jesus will find the Muslims worshiping one God exclusively without elevating anyone else to the Godhead, and their dietary laws are much closer to the Jewish laws.

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

Jews are waiting for Messiah, who will bring Jewish victory over their enemies and create paradise on earth for them. The Jewish

Messiah will not be Jesus Christ. Christians have been waiting for Jesus' second coming for two thousand years. The Quran does not mention Jesus' second advent, Messiah, or Mahdi. Those Muslims who believe in Jesus' second advent base their arguments on Prophet Muhammad's Traditions. He supposedly mentioned Jesus' arrival close to the end of times to defeat “Dajjal,” the antichrist. These traditions are questionable for several reasons.

- 1) The Quran repeatedly stresses that the Last Hour will be sudden, and only God knows the timing. If Jesus suddenly appeared on the world stage as some Ahadith state, we would understand that Judgment Day is imminent.
- 2) The arrival of this superman gives false hope that a white knight will appear from the cloud with angels to save all believers from evil. Instead, believers struggle to better this world.
- 3) Many pseudo-prophets have misconstrued these traditions of the "promised Messiah” or Mahdi, resulting in new sects and further divisions.
- 4) If Jesus comes the second time, Jesus will be the last Prophet, not Muhammad, which contradicts one of Islam’s bedrock teachings.

**TRINITARIAN CHRISTIANITY
IN THE POST-JESUS ERA**

Chapter 20

PAULINE'S CHRISTIANITY

JESUS APOSTLE TO THE JEWS, PAUL APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

Jesus' mission was limited to Jews only: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and changed Christianity. Jesus's Unitarian Christianity and Paul's Trinitarian Christianity are two different sects with a shared vision of Jesus as the Messiah of Jews and Gentiles. Paul became the leading missionary of the upcoming movement. He played a decisive role in extending it beyond Judaism to become a worldwide religion. He traveled tens of thousands of miles around the Mediterranean, spreading the new faith.

BRIEF LIFE HISTORY OF PAUL

Paul was born in Tarsus (now Turkey). He was granted Roman citizenship as a reward for his mercenary service to Rome. This fact explains his two names. When speaking Greek, he used his Roman surname, Paul. Within the Jewish community, he used his Jewish name, Saul. He received his rabbinic training in Jerusalem. Like many famous leaders, Paul was controversial, and the Quran does not mention him.

PAUL THE PERSECUTOR

Paul was not one of Jesus' disciples and had never met Jesus in person. He first appeared on the scene of history as a persecutor of the newly founded Christian Church about two years after Christ's death. Stephen, a new convert to Christianity, was stoned to death. The murderers "lay down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58).

PAUL'S CONVERSION

In Acts, Paul, on his way to Damascus to persecute the Church, is stopped by a visionary experience of Jesus. What happened has been difficult to determine, as the accounts in Acts and Paul's letters differ on the details. For example, when Paul talks about his conversion, he does not mention a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus.

PAUL'S INFLUENCE ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is critical to note that Paul's perspective influenced and inspired the entire New Testament. Thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written by him. He made an impact as a theologian and letter-writer. He was the first to work through many intriguing questions about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF PAUL'S TEACHINGS

Jewish law is the focus of many passages in the Gospels. Jesus repeatedly insisted he meant to uphold and fulfill Jewish scriptures, not contradict them. Jesus admonished his followers to observe the Law unwaveringly. Not only does Jesus keep the laws of the Torah, but he also added that the observance of the Law should be not only external but also internal. He argued that the whole Law could be summarized in the maxim commonly called the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Jesus made some common-sense exceptions to the rigid Law and had a different explanation than the other Jewish leaders.

ABANDONMENT OF TORAH LAWS FOR GENTILES ONLY

But factions among those following Jesus began to hold divergent views. Woe, then, unto those who are bent on wickedness - [woe] for the suffering [that will befall them] on a grievous Day! (43:65)

“Divergent views” regarding Jesus' nature and the inadmissibility of worshipping anyone but God. Paul replaced the Torah Laws with the faith in Christ and the crucifixion of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for the world's sins. Abandoning the complicated laws of the Torah was a direct contradiction to the teachings of Jesus. Jesus' words are so clearly stated that doubt is eliminated. Christian apologists have advanced complicated and sometimes incomprehensible explanations to reconcile Paul and Jesus' contradictory stances regarding the sacred Torah Laws. Ironically, Paul himself, as a practicing Jew, followed Jewish law.

SPLIT IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Paul's insistence on not observing Moses' Laws offended the original group of disciples, who wanted to remain in a more exclusive Jewish sect. They broke up with Paul after a passionate dispute.

SALVATION IS FREE THROUGH GRACE

The traditional concept of repentance, the atonement of sins, and leading a righteous life in the quest for salvation requires psychological transformation and a radical change in sinners' lifestyles. Because beliefs alone do not make a better person, behavior does. Islam, as in Judaism, stresses orthopraxy (actions or good deeds). Paul's Christianity stresses orthodoxy (correct beliefs), a concept based only on belief systems, without demanding corrective actions. Paul declared salvation free through grace, not works. All sinners must believe Jesus died on the cross for the world's sins, theoretically undermining sinner reformation.

To an outsider, Paul was an exceptional salesman. He said what he had to say to attract pagans to his version of Christianity. By abandoning the Torah laws and having two sets of rules, one for gentiles and another for Jews, and declaring salvation free, Paul made Christianity irresistible to the pagans of the Roman Empire.

The Church spread far and wide, opening doors to pagans. Dietary restrictions on eating pork and the painful ritual of circumcision were abandoned to placate Rome's heathens.

TRIUNE GOD

Since the Gentiles or pagans were polytheists, Jesus' strict monotheism was another hurdle. Christian leaders in the latter centuries came up with another compromise, a triune God. The traditional Jewish Sabbath was also abandoned.

BERNARD SHAW TAKE ON PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Bernard Shaw, in *Androcles and the Lion*, explains Paul's conversion and theology in the following words: "The conversion of Paul was no conversion at all: it was Paul who converted the religion that has raised one man above sin and death into a religion that delivered millions of men so completely into their dominion that their common nature became a horror to them, and the religious life became a denial of life. There is not one word of Pauline Christianity in the characteristic utterances of Jesus."

THE IMPORTANCE OF PAUL'S MISSION

- 1) Most Islamic authorities reject Paul's contributions to man's religious history for distorting Jesus' original message. Today's Christians profess Paul's Christianity. Without Pauline's Christianity, the Christian movement would have died, and Jesus' message would have faded into history.
- 2) Paul's mission was to bring Gentiles or pagan polytheists into the fold of monotheism. He was wildly successful in converting pagan idol-worshippers into believing in some form of monotheism. A similar miraculous feat was performed six hundred years later by Prophet Muhammad. The difference is that Muhammad preached absolute and pristine monotheism and rejected any compromise on God's

unity. He had to use his arms to defend himself. Without the Apostle Paul and Prophet Muhammad, monotheism would have been a small minority today, a needle in a haystack, mainly in the form of Judaism. Islam prefers Paul's adulterated monotheism to the dualism of Zoroastrianism or the worship of pagan idols.

Chapter 21

THE BIRTH OF TRINITY

WHAT IS TRINITY?

Christians believe God is trinitarian, i.e., three persons in one—Father (God), Son of God (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost). Jesus was elevated to the second person in the Trinity. Nowhere does the New Testament say that there are three persons, all distinct, all equally God, and yet there is only one God. There is no record of Christ ever mentioning the Trinity. Old Testament does not explicitly teach trinitarian doctrine. Many Christian theologians, apologists, and philosophers believe the Trinity doctrine can be inferred from the Old and New Testaments.

The Bible translators of past centuries were so zealous to find support for their belief in the triune God formula in the New Testament. They added verse 1 John 5:7: **“For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one.”** This forgery first appeared in the 1522 third edition.

GOD IS THE FATHER (METAPHORICALLY speaking)

Jesus said: ***“Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, He who is in heaven.” (Matthew 23:9)***

Jesus' unique relationship to God is expressed through his Father designation. In prayers, Jesus used the Aramaic word *abba* (“father”) for God, which is not unheard-of in religious discourse in Judaism.). The term “my Father” is a metaphor that refers to God, the Originator and Sustainer of the entire universe, just like any father involved in procreation, supporting, and nurturing the coming generation. Jesus himself embraced the God of the Hebrew patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

Subsequently, however, some followers of Jesus lifted this expression from the realm of metaphor and transferred it to literality. Anthropomorphism is the perception of a divine being or beings in human form or the recognition of human qualities in these beings. Judaism and Islam reject an anthropomorphic deity, believing God is unique and beyond human comprehension. God as a “person,” in a literal sense, compromises God's essence as transcendent, omnipresent, unique, indefinable, perfect, self-sufficient, etc.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost of God becomes one of the most elusive and difficult themes in Christian theology. It refers to one of the three persons in the Godhead but does not evoke a concrete image as the “Father” or “Son” does. The Holy Spirit tends to be present more as a power than a person in the New Testament. However, there was a distinctive personal representation of the dove at Jesus’ baptism.

John's Gospel sketches out the Holy Spirit's characteristics. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit takes place only after Christ's Ascension; it is the beginning of an exciting time of salvation, in which the Holy Spirit is sent as the Paraclete (Counselor) to the Church remaining behind in this world.

THE QURANIC VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The term ruh often denotes “divine inspiration.” Occasionally, however, it is used to describe the medium through which such inspiration is imparted to God’s elect: in other words, the angel (or angelic force) of revelation. The designation of the angel as ruh (“spirit” or “soul”) indicates that this category of beings is purely spiritual, without any physical element. In Luke’s Gospel, the angel Gabriel was the holy spirit who announced John the Baptist and Jesus' births. Angel Gabriel is also the Holy Spirit in the Quran.

THE PAGAN CONCEPT OF THE SON OF GOD

In Roman and Greek polytheistic culture, rulers and heroes were called sons of Zeus, Poseidon, or Apollo. Historians believed Alexander the Great implied he was a demigod by using the title “Son of Ammon-Zeus.” His mother, Olympias, declared Zeus impregnated her while she slept under an oak tree sacred to God. The Trinitarian Christian concept of the Son of God is more in tune with pagan views. (See before for the Jewish idea of the Son of God)

INFLUENCE OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY

One of the decisive developments in Western philosophy was the widespread merging of Greek philosophical concepts with Judeo-Christian religious and scriptural traditions. A direct influence on second-century Christian theology was the philosopher and theologian **Philo** of Alexandria (a.k.a. Philo Judaeus). Philo interpreted the Jewish Bible teachings that God created the cosmos by his Word (*logos*). Another influence may have been **Plotinus** (204–270 CE), who postulated a single source from which all forms of existence emanate and with which the soul seeks a mystical union. He also described three hypostases (underlying substance as opposed to attributes). The first traces of Christ's divinity appeared as the Logos, the “word” that issues from eternity in the Gospel of John: *In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1)*.

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT JESUS' NATURE

After Jesus' death, Jewish followers disagreed about the nature of Jesus Christ.

1. Some Jews rejected Jesus altogether.
2. Many believed that Jesus was the Prophet sent to reform the Jews.

3. Some thought Jesus was a human being and later exalted to Godhead.
4. Yet another group claimed he was always God.
5. There were a myriad of other controversies about Jesus' nature.

BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW: HOW JESUS EVOLVED FROM MAN TO GOD?

THE RESURRECTION: THE FIRST STEP IN JESUS DIVINITY

Jesus was subjected to an appalling and humiliating death. Everyone in the Roman Empire knew about the crucifixion and Jesus' death in this way. That God's Anointed One could have been so publicly humiliated seemed outrageous. The scandalous death of a Messiah who died like a common criminal on the cross presented a dilemma for his disciples. They were shocked by his death scandal and could not believe their faith in him was misplaced.

There is conflicting information regarding Jesus' resurrection in the Gospels. Whether Jesus' resurrection was real or mere delusion is beside the point. Public humiliation was conquered through the belief in the resurrection, which convinced early Christians that Jesus was not a criminal and had died not for his sins; he died for others' sins. It was simply intolerable to zealous Jews like Paul that God's special envoy could have suffered a criminal's death. He describes it as a "stumbling block" for Jews (1 Corinthians 1.23). Belief in Jesus' resurrection elevated the humiliated Messiah into a victorious superman and eventually led his followers to claim Jesus was God. They worshipped Jesus alongside God in the earliest Christianity.

IN WHAT SENSE WAS JESUS GOD?

Jesus, being God, was understood in many ways. In the second and third centuries, Christian theologians attempted to refine their views about Christ's divinity. Some claimed that Jesus was fully human but not divine. Others said that he was divine, but not human. Yet, others asserted that Jesus was two beings, one divine and another human, coexisting temporarily during his ministry. All these views were later rejected as false dogmas. By the fourth century, most Christians believed Jesus was God, but the question remained: in what sense?

ARIAN CONTROVERSY: HUMAN JESUS EXALTED TO GOD

Christology is the branch of Christian theology relating to Christ's person, nature, and his role. Jesus was adopted as the Son of God at some point, at his baptism, resurrection, or ascension. Some early Christians considered Jesus a fully human being until, at some point, God exalted him and made him his Son, the Messiah, the Lord. Therefore, Jesus is not equal but subordinate to God the Father.

Bishop Arius (256–336 CE) of Alexandria, Egypt, was a subordinationist who believed the pre-existent Son of God was directly created by the Father, before all ages, and that he was subordinate to God the Father. Arius' position was that the Son was the first of God's creations and that the Father later created all things through the Son. Arianism became the dominant view in some regions in the Roman Empire. According to Arius, "*homoousios* (same substance) and *homoiousios* (of similar substance) were unbiblical, and that the Father is greater than the Son because in divine scripture nothing is written about *homoousios* or *homoiousios*, and that they are above men's knowledge and understanding.

JESUS ALWAYS BEING GOD (INCARNATE CHRISTOLOGY)

Arius' teaching was initially opposed by his bishop Alexander of Alexandria, who believed Jesus existed eternally, and the Son was equal to the Father. Many churchmen, adhering to subordinationist traditions about the Son, rallied to Arius' side. Alternatively, some opponents supported the theologies of the eternal existence of the Son and his (in some sense) equality with the Father. The dispute threatened to split the Church, and a series of councils followed, each excommunicating and vindicating Arius and his defenders or their opponents.

CONVERSION OF EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

Roman Emperor Constantine was a pagan who converted to Christianity in the fourth century. He knew something had to be done to unify Rome under a single religion. Due to the rising numbers of Christians, a conflict between pagans and Christians grew. Each side successively strove to win the favor of the emperor, attempting to manipulate imperial power to crush its opposition. He summoned the first ecumenical council of the Church at Nicea to settle the religious dispute.

NICENE CREED (325)

In 325, when a council of bishops convened by Emperor Constantine (280–337 CE) decreed the **Father and Son were homoousios (same substance or essence)**. The same term was later applied to the Holy Spirit to designate him as "same in essence" as the Father and Son. The word homoousios means "same substance," whereas the **word homoiousios implies** "similar substance." Same implies that two (or more) things are identical. Similar means that two (or more) things are nearly identical but not quite.

Arius and his party were excommunicated. The intended meaning of *ousia* here was far from clear. They likely settled on the term

because it was disagreeable with the Arius party. The new and ambiguous formula sparked controversy, as subordinationists and anti-subordinationists differed in their understanding of the phrase. In response to the controversy sparked by Arius, a critical mass of bishops rallied around what eventually became standard language about the Trinity.

COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (381 CE)

By the time of the council of Constantinople (381 CE), *homoousios* was understood as asserting the Father and Son to not only be similar beings but also in **some sense, one being**.

While it stopped short of saying the Holy Spirit was *homoousios* with the Father and Son. Over the ensuing period, the same argument used to promote the divinity of the Son was reapplied to the Holy Spirit, and eventually, inhibitions applying *homoousios* to the Holy Spirit evaporated.

COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON: JESUS IS BOTH DIVINE AND HUMAN

The last issue that needed clarification was the relationship between the divine and the human within Christ, which was decided in the Council of Chalcedon. Since there were three divine persons in one divine essence, there were two natures, one divine and the other human, in one person, Jesus Christ. Jesus was not fifty percent human and fifty percent divine: he was one hundred percent human and one hundred percent divine.

UNITY OF BOTH NATURES

Both natures of Jesus coexist within one person, united “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” This interpretation of the person of Christ affirmed oneness with God and his oneness with humanity while still maintaining the

oneness of his person. This has been the Catholic doctrine of the person of Christ ever since.

The main idea behind this concept of “unity of divine and human” within Jesus was that only a Savior who is both truly God and true man can secure man’s salvation. **Nestorianism** was declared heresy, as it considered the two natures (human and divine) of Jesus Christ distinct and functioning in parallel. **Monophysitism** was declared heretical because it states that after the union of the divine and the human, Jesus Christ had only a single nature, divinity, as the divine absorbed the human.

WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT HIMSELF?

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up and knelt before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call Me good?” Jesus replied. “No one is good except God alone.” (Mark 10:17-18)

Jesus humbly stressed his humanness by stating, “Why do you call Me good?” and that only God is good, or in other words, he was not God.

Chapter 22

THE QURANIC REBUTTAL TO JESUS BEING THE SON OF GOD

MARIOLATRY AND TRINITY

The Quran categorically rejects the Christian claim that Jesus was God in human flesh. Despite Jesus' supernatural birth and all his miracles, he was still a human being. When it comes to functioning, Christ is no different from any other apostle. The Quran presents a multifaceted approach to the complex subject of worshipping Jesus, Mary, and the Trinity.

HE BEGETS NOT OR BEGOTTEN

SAY: "He is One God, Allah the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Beings." "He begets not, and neither is He begotten, and there is nothing to compare with Him." (112:1-4)

The concepts of Primary Cause and eternal, independent Being, combined with the idea that everything existing or conceivable goes back to Him as its source, dependent on Him for its beginning and continued existence. "He begets not, nor is begotten" is a denial of the Christian dogma of Jesus being the Son of God and the pagan Arab's belief that angels are God's daughters.

JESUS IS HUMAN AS ADAM

Jesus was human—like Adam—in Allah's sight; the nature of Jesus is similar to that of Adam, whom Allah created out of dust, and then said unto him, "Be"—and he is. [This is] the truth from your Sustainer; be not among the doubters! (3:59-60) [As for Jesus,] he was nothing but [a human being] a servant [of Ours] whom We had graced [with prophethood], and whom We made an example for the children of Israel. (43:59)

The above passage is part of an argument against the Christian doctrine of Jesus' divinity. Here, the Quran stresses that Jesus, like Adam, was only a mortal "created out of dust," i.e., out of substances, both organic and inorganic, found in their elementary forms on and in the earth. It is implied in this sentence that Adam represents humanity through the use of the present tense.

RELATIVITY OF TIME

"Be—and he is" should be understood within the context of God's timelessness and not from human perception. The "time" the Quran often speaks of has nothing to do with human time definitions. Instead, it alludes to an ultimate reality in which time has neither a place nor a meaning. In other words, a day, an eon, a thousand years, or fifty thousand years are all alike to Him. They have an apparent time reality only within the created world and none with the Creator. (22:47 and 70:4) God is above time, and He alone knows the meaning of "Be—and he is."

INTERCESSION AND THE SON OF GOD

And those [beings] whom some invoke besides Allah have it not in their power to intercede [on Judgment Day] for any unless they have [in their lifetime] borne witness to the truth and have been aware [that Allah is one and unique]. Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] who created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah." How perverted are their minds! (43:86-87)

[Those whom they regard as Allah's "offspring" are but His] honored servants: they speak not until He has spoken to them, and [whenever they act,] they act at His behest. They cannot intercede for any, but those whom He has [already] graced with His goodly acceptance since they stand in reverent awe of Him. And if any of them (Prophets of God) said, "I am a deity besides Him"—that

one We should requite with hell: hence, all such evildoers are requitted by hell. (21:26-29)

God's offspring refers to Jesus, whom Christians regard as the Son of God. It also refers to the angels, whom the pre-Islamic Arabs considered God's daughters (since they were erroneously conceived as females). It is only what God has revealed to these honorable servants of God that they are called to proclaim what He has revealed to them. "Beings whom some invoke besides God" relates to deified saints or prophets, especially in the context to Jesus. See 10:3— "There is none that could intercede with Him unless He grants leave therefor."

EZRA AND CHRIST SONS OF GOD

And the Jews say, "Ezra is God's son," while the Christians say, "The Christ is God's son." Such are the sayings they utter with their mouths, following in spirit the assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the truth!" [They deserve the imprecation:] "May God destroy them!" How perverted are their minds! They have taken their Rabbis and monks-as well as Christ, Son of Mary - for their Lords beside God. However, they were bidden to worship none but the One God, save for whom there is no deity. This is the One who is utterly remote, in His limitless glory, from anything to which they may ascribe a share in His divinity! (9:30-31)

The charge of shirk ("the ascribing of divinity or "divine qualities" to aught beside God") is leveled against the Jews and the Christians. In amplification of the statement that they "do not follow the religion of truth [which God has enjoined upon them." Regarding the belief attributed to the Jews that Ezra (or, in the Arabicized form of this name, Uzayr) was "God's son," only the Jews of Arabia, and not all Jews, have been thus accused. Some of the Jews of Medina once said to Muhammad, "How could we follow thee when thou hast forsaken our Qiblah and dost not consider Ezra, a son of God?"

Ezra occupies a unique and esteemed position among Jews and has been praised in the most extravagant terms. He restored and codified the Torah after it was lost during the Babylonian Exile and “edited” it in more or less the form it has today. He promoted the establishment of an exclusive, legalistic religion that became dominant in later Judaism. Since then, he has been revered to such a degree that the Talmudists regard his verdicts on the Law of Moses as equivalent to the Law itself. In the Quranic ideology, it amounts to the unforgivable sin of shirk, as it implies the elevation of a human being to a quasi-divine lawgiver.

WHY GOD NEEDS A SON WHEN THE WHOLE UNIVERSE BELONGS TO HIM

Some people assert, “Allah has taken Himself a son!” No, but His is all that is in the heavens and on earth; all things devoutly obey His will. Had Allah willed to take a son, He could have chosen anyone He wanted out of whatever He has created! However, He is limitless in His glory! (39:4) Self-sufficient is He: unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth! No evidence whatsoever for this [assertion]: would you ascribe unto Allah something which you cannot know? (10:68)

GOD IS INFINITE WHILE SON IS FINITE

And Allah’s is in the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is Allah’s countenance. Behold, Allah is infinite, all-knowing. And yet some people assert, “Allah has taken unto Himself a son!” Limitless is He in His glory! Nay, but His is all that is in the heavens and on earth; all things devoutly obey His will. (2:115-116)

TOTAL FALSEHOOD

Furthermore, [this divine writ is meant] to warn all those who assert, “Allah has taken unto Himself a son.” No knowledge

whatsoever have they of Him, and neither had their forefathers: dreadful is this saying that comes out of their mouths, [and] nothing but falsehood do they utter! (18:4-5)

SON PRESUPPOSE LIKENESS WITH THE FATHER

The idea that God might have a “son” would presuppose a degree of likeness between “the father” and “the son.” It contradicts the idea that God is unique in every respect, so that “there is nothing like Him” (42:11) and “nothing could be compared with Him” (112:4). It amounts to an attempt to define God, who is “sublimely exalted above anything men may devise by way of definition” (see 6:100). Islam rejects an anthropomorphic deity (a divine being in human form), believing that God is unique and beyond human comprehension.

PROGENY PRESUPPOSES INCOMPLETENESS

Progeny implies incompleteness before procreation. In whatever sense, incompleteness negates God's perfection. God is remote from the incompleteness inherent in the need or desire for progeny. This precludes His having a “son” in a literal or metaphorical sense.

OFFSPRING IMPLIES CONTINUATION TO ANOTHER BEING

Death is the outcome for all created beings. Having offspring implies organic continuation.

God is Transcendent and Everlasting; He has no beginning or end.

REJECTION OF THE ADORATION OF PROPHETS, SAINTS, AND ANGELS

It is impossible that a human being to whom Allah had granted revelation, sound judgment, and prophethood should, after that, have said to people, “Worship me besides Allah.” Rather [did he

exhort them], “Become men of Allah by spreading the knowledge of the divine writ, and by your deep study [thereof].” And neither did he bid you take the angels and the prophets for your Lords: [for] would he bid you deny the truth after you have surrendered yourselves unto Allah? (3:79-80)

Do not attribute divine or semi-divine powers to them: a categorical rejection of saints and angels' adoration.

WILL I WORSHIP JESUS?

Say [O Prophet]: “If the Most Gracious [truly] had a son, I would be the first to worship him!” Utterly remote, in His glory, is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth—the Sustainer, in almightiness enthroned—from all they may attribute to Him by way of definition! (43:81-82)

ONLY GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL

Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the Christ, son of Mary.” Say: “And who could have prevailed with God in any way had it been His will to destroy the Christ, Son of Mary, and his mother, everyone on earth—all of them? For God is dominion over the heavens and the earth and all in between them. He creates what He wills, and God can will anything!” (5:17)

HOW CHRIST’S DIVINITY COMFORTED THE MECCAN IDOLATERS

Whenever the Son of Mary is used as an example, [O Muhammad,] lo! Your people raise an outcry on this score and say, “Which is better—our deities, or he?” [But] it is only in the spirit of dispute that they put this comparison before you: yea, they are contentious folk! (43:57-58)

Christ's sonship aided and comforted the Meccan idolaters, who believed God had sons and daughters. The pagan Quraysh objected

to the Quranic condemnation of their idolatrous worship of angels, whom they described as “our deities,” and pointed to the parallel Christian worship of Jesus as the Son of God and even as God incarnate.

The pagans of Arabia argued thus: The Quran states Jesus was purely human—and yet the Christians, whom the same Quran describes as followers of earlier revelations, consider him divine. “Hence, we are justified in worshiping angels, who are certainly superior to a mere human being?” The Quran explicitly condemns, in many places, the deification of Jesus by Christians. This unwarranted deification cannot be used as an argument for pagan angel worship because such an argument amounts to applying a false analogy to a false proposition.

THE DEIFICATION OF JESUS AND THE LAST HOUR

And had We so willed, [O you who worship angels,] We could have made you into angels to succeed on earth! This [divine writ] is indeed a means of knowing [that] the Last Hour is bound to come. Therefore, follow Me, this is the straight path. And let not Satan bar you [from it]-for he is your open foe! (43:60-62)

“Succeeding one another” implies that Jesus was not a supernatural being. The angels are also created beings finite in their existence and, therefore, utterly removed from the status of divinity. The specific mention of the Last Hour in the above context is meant to stress man’s ultimate responsibility before the Creator. It is also meant to stress that worship is due to Him alone.

BEAR WITH THEM

[But Allah has complete knowledge of the true believer] and his [despairing] cry: “O my Sustainer! These are people who will not believe!” You bear with them and say, “Peace [be upon you]!”—For in time, they will know [the truth]. (43:88-89)

Every believer (of any denomination) who is distressed at the blindness of people is advised to “bear with them” who attribute divinity or divine qualities to any being other than God Himself and hope they will see the light.

THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS UPON DEATH

Yet, there is not one of the followers of earlier revelation who does not grasp the truth about Jesus at the moment of his death. On the Day of Resurrection, he [himself] shall bear witness to the truth against them. (4:159)

According to this verse, all believing Jews and Christians will realize upon their death that Jesus was truly a prophet of God. He was neither an impostor nor God's Son.

WE ALL ARE GOD'S CHILDREN

And [both] the Jews and the Christians say, “We are Allah’s children and His beloved ones.” Say: “Why, then, does He cause you to suffer for your sins? No, you are but human beings of His creation. He forgives whom He wills, and He causes suffering whom He wills: for Allah’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, and with Him is all journeys’ end” (5:18).

“We are God’s children, and His beloved ones”: see Exodus 4:22-23 (Israel is My Son), Jeremiah 31:9 (I am a father to Israel), and the many parallel expressions in the Gospels.

MARIOLATRY AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOD AND JESUS

On the Day when Allah shall assemble all the apostles and ask, “What response did you receive?” - they will answer, “We do not know; verily, it is Thou alone who fully knowest all the things beyond the reach of a created being’s perception.” (5:109) And

lo! Allah said: "O Jesus, Son of Mary! Did you say unto men, 'Worship my mother and me as deities as God'?" Jesus answered: "Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [state]! Had I said this, Thou would indeed have known it! Thou knew all within me, whereas I do not know what is in Thy Self. Thou alone fully know all things beyond a created being's perception. (5:116)

Towards the end of the third century of the Christian era, some theologians of Alexandria employed the expression 'Mother of God' in connection with Mary. In 431, the Council of Ephesus officially used 'Mother of God' for Mary. Subsequently, belief in Mary's divinity and Mariolatry (idolatrous worship of the Virgin Mary) spread among Christians.

SUFFERING ON A GRIEVOUS DAY

But factions among those [who came after Jesus] held divergent views. Woe, then, to those bent on evildoing—[woe]for the suffering [that will befall them] on a grievous Day! Are they [who are lost in sin] but waiting for the Last Hour—[waiting] it comes upon them suddenly, without their being aware [of its approach]? On that Day, [erstwhile]friends will be foes—[all] save the God-conscious. (43:65-67)

Some held divergent views regarding the nature of Jesus by raising a human being to the godhead, an allusion to subsequent developments in Christianity. They regarded him as "the son of God"—and, therefore, as "God incarnate." They will hate one another on Judgment Day—those who realize they have been led astray and those responsible for leading others astray.

MONSTROUS CLAIM

As it is, some assert, "The Most Gracious has taken unto Himself a son! Indeed, [by this assertion] you have brought forth

something monstrous, whereat the heavens might well-nigh be rent into fragments, and the earth be split asunder, and the mountains fall in ruins! That man should ascribe a son to the Most Gracious, although it is inconceivable that the Most Gracious should take unto Himself a son! (19:88-92)

WARN CHRISTIANS OF THE DAY OF REGRETS

And [thus it was that Jesus always said]: “Verily, Allah is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer; so, worship [none but] Him: this [alone] is a straight way.” And yet, the sects [that follow the Bible] are at variance among themselves [about Jesus]! Woe, then, unto all who deny the truth when that awesome Day will appear! How well will they hear and comprehend [the truth] on the Day when they come before Us! Today, however, these evildoers are lost in error: hence, warn them of [the coming of] the Day of Regrets, when everything will have been decided - for yet they are heedless, and they do not believe [in it]. Behold, We alone shall remain after the earth, and all who live on it passed away, and [when] unto Us all will be brought back. (19:36-40)

ASSOCIATIONISM A GRAVE SIN

Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the Christ, Son of Mary; noting that the Christ [himself] said, “O children of Israel! Worship Allah [alone]; who is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer.” [See Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; John 20:17.] Whoever ascribes divinity to any being beside Allah, unto him, will Allah deny paradise, and his goal shall be fire, and such evildoers will have none to succor them! (5:72)

DESIST FROM SAYING: ALLAH IS THE THIRD OF A TRINITY

Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “Allah is the third of a trinity”—seeing that there is no deity saves One God. And unless

they desist from this assertion, grievous suffering is bound to befall those who are bent on denying the truth. Will they not then turn toward Allah in repentance and ask for His forgiveness? For Allah is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (5:73-74)

Whoever ascribes divinity to any being beside God will “God deny paradise, and his goal shall be the fire” is a general Quranic warning to all associationists. However, the Trinitarian Christians assert that they intend to worship one God.

APPEAL TO THE FOLLOWERS OF THE BIBLE

O Bible followers! Now there has come unto you, Our Apostle, to clarify much of what you have been concealing [from yourselves] of the Bible and to pardon much. Now there has come unto you from Allah a light and a clear divine writ. Through this, Allah shows all who seek His goodly acceptance the path leading to salvation. And, by His grace, He brings them out of the depths of darkness into the light and guides them onto a straight way. (5:15-16) O followers of the Bible! Now, after a prolonged time during which no apostles have appeared, there has come unto you [this] Our Apostle to make [the truth] clear to you, lest you say, “No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us, nor any Warner.” For now, there has appeared unto you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner—since Allah has the power to will anything. (5:19)

The concealing of something from oneself is a reference to the gradual obscuring, by the Bible followers, of its original verities, which they are now unwilling to admit even to themselves. By following the Trinitarian God, Christians have forgotten the original message of Jesus' monotheism.

JEWISH AND GENTILES' REACTION

As the Gospel shows, the application of the name “Son of God” to Jesus was offensive to Jews because it smacked of gentile

polytheism. Facing both Jews and Greeks, the church declared Jesus Christ God's Son. The Son of God is antithesis to Jewish claims that the eternal could have no sons. He is the only Son, in opposition to Greek myths of divine procreation and multiple gods. Jews and Muslims have always found the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Jesus scandalous.

According to **Adolf von Harnack**, the eminent German theologian and scholar, Christian dogma appeared to be a corruption of Jesus' simple faith. It was viewed as an intrusion of Greek philosophy that obscured the Christian truth it set out to guard. Such eminent Western thinkers and giants, like **Sir Isaac Newton**, believed Christianity went astray in the fourth century when the First Council of Nicea propounded erroneous doctrines of Christ's nature and that Trinitarian passages in the Bible were latter-day alterations of the original text. It took almost four hundred years to define the Trinity doctrine and elevate Jesus into the Godhead. Greek ideals of godly plurality overshadowed Christianity's monotheism. The accretions of councils and theologies have carried Christian doctrine a long way from the simple purity of the Nazarene. After his death, Jesus Christ's religion became a religion about Jesus Christ.

Chapter 23

WHY CHRISTIANS AND MAGIANS AMONG THE UNITARIAN CATAGORY

ARE CHRISTIANS IDOL WORSHIPERS?

Like all other Christians, the delegation of Christians of Najran maintained that Jesus was “the Son of God” and, therefore, God incarnate. At the end of the talks, Christians wanted to pray. Since there was no church in Medina, the Prophet invited them to conduct their service in his mosque, adding, “It is a place consecrated to God.” It was the first church service held in an Islamic Mosque. If the Prophet believed that Christians were idol worshippers, he would not have allowed Christians to worship in the Holy Mosque in Medina. The Arabian idol worshippers were never given such privilege to worship in one of Islam holiest sites. Also, Muslim men are allowed to marry Christian women but not allowed to marry idol worshippers.

THE CHRISTIANS AND MAGIANS AMONG UNITARIAN FAITHS?

Verily, as for those who have attained faith [in this divine writ] [Muslims], those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, and the Magians, [on the one hand]. And those bent on ascribing divinity to aught but Allah, [on the other] verily, Allah will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, Allah is the witness unto everything. (22:17)

The followers of Zoroaster (Magians) and Christians are included in the category of unitarian faith, along with Jews, Muslims, and Sabians in verse 22:16. Zoroastrians believe in one God called *Ahura Mazda* (Wise or good Lord), who created the world. The dualism in Zoroastrianism is the complete separation of good and evil and the existence of an evil God. This is the earliest and most

imperfect form of monotheism in human history, even before Judaism. The Sabians seem to have been a monotheistic religious group intermediate between Judaism and Christianity. They were the followers of John the Baptist. It is noteworthy that Christians and Magians are not among those who attribute divinity to anything besides God. Can idol worshippers also receive forgiveness and grace? “Those who are bent on ascribing divinity to beings other than God” reject the principle of His oneness and uniqueness (22:17). God will decide their destiny with justice on the resurrection, and they will not be arbitrarily condemned.

DO NOT OVERSTEP THE BOUNDS OF TRUTH

Say: “O followers of the Gospel! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs, and do not follow the errant views of people who have gone astray aforetime, and have led many [others] astray, and are still straying from the right path.” (5:77)

O followers of the Gospel! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs. And do not say of Allah anything but the truth. The Christ Jesus, Son of Mary, was but Allah’s Apostle— [the fulfillment of] His promise that He had conveyed unto Mary and a soul created by Him. Believe, then, in Allah and His apostles, and do not say, “[Allah is] a trinity.” Desist [from this assertion] for your good. Allah is but One God; utterly remote is He, in His glory, from having a son: unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, and none is as worthy of trust as Allah. Never did Christ feel too proud to be Allah’s servant, nor do the angels near unto Him. (4:171-172)

These passages are addressed to Christians whose love for Jesus has caused them to overstep the bounds of truth by elevating him to the rank of divinity, and they persist in this assertion. Many communities have come to attribute divinity to their spiritual leaders - a phenomenon frequently encountered in religion history. Since Christians are addressed, the term *Kitab* (book) is rendered as

“Gospel” in this context. Like all other human beings, the Quran points out that Jesus was a soul created by Him.

The next question is why the Magians and Christians are included in the unitarian faith, although they attribute divine qualities to other beings besides God. In the case of Magians, the answer is straightforward. Yes, they believe in the duality of the Godhead, but they worship only *Ahura Mazda* (Wise or good Lord). They intend to worship one God only.

WHY CHRISTIANS INCLUDED IN UNITARIAN FAITH?

One possibility is the Quran is alluding to earlier unitarian Christians during the lifetime of Jesus, but that does not explain the inclusion of Magians in the monotheistic category. By their deification of Jesus, they are guilty of the sin of "shirk" (the ascribing of divinity to anyone or anything besides God). Christians do not consciously worship a plurality of deities. Theoretically, their theology postulates belief in One God, who is conceived as manifesting Himself in a trinity of aspects, or "persons," of whom Jesus is supposed to be one. Their worship of Jesus is not based on conscious intent but flows from their overstepping the bounds of truth in their love and reverence of him. Islam judges actions based on their intentions. The Prophet said: "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended." Since Christians consciously worship one God, their rewards will be accordingly. The next question arises whether God prefers a diminished version of Christian monotheism over Magians' dualism?

ADULTERATED MONOTHEISM OVER DUALISM

Christians' adulterated monotheism is better than Persian dualism, and how do we know this?

Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, despite this, their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with Allah rests all power of decision, first and last. (30:2-4)

In the above verses, God favored Christians over Persians. This irrefutable argument is supported by the prediction of the Quran of the victory of the Byzantines, who believed in the Trinity as a depiction of monotheism over the dualist Persians, indicating God's favor for Christianity over Zoroastrianism.

(3) **Christ was the quintessential human being:** The Quran argues with Christians as to why Jesus was a human being and not God incarnate. Christ was born like any human being, and he ate and drank and was persecuted and died physically. Since God is all-knowing, there is nothing anyone can add that God does not know. Unqualified intercession conflicts with the concept of His omniscience, and belief in intercessors, whether it is through Jesus or Muhammad, is contrary to Islamic teachings.

(4) **The promise of salvation:** The Quran categorically states that righteous Christians will enter paradise in many places.

SPECTRUM OF SHIRK

There are degrees of shirk.

At the extreme end of the spectrum, those who worship idols and deny God's oneness are at risk of their salvation.

Dualism of Magians for believing in two Gods: God of good and God of evil.

Trinitarian monotheism of Christians for elevating Jesus to the godhead, and ultimately, they do worship one God. God favored Christians over Persians.

Different grades of *shirk* are distinguished, apart from pure polytheism:

Shirk of customs includes all superstitions, such as the belief in omens and the seeking of help from soothsayers.

Shirk of worship is manifested in the belief in the powers of created things—e.g., the reverencing of saints, worshipping holy stones, and praying at the grave of a holy man.

Shirk of knowledge”) credit anyone, such as astrologers or interpreters of dreams, with knowledge of the future. In comparison to polytheism, all of these types of shirks are minor ones.

Chapter 27

HOW DID PROPHET MUHAMMAD TREAT CHRISTIANS?

There are two outstanding examples from the Prophet's tradition of respect where he put into practice the 21st-century concept of pluralism fourteen hundred years ago.

(1) ST. CATHERINE'S MONASTERY

At the foot of Mount Sinai is St. Catherine's Monastery, described as the oldest Christian monastery still in use for its original function. Moses is said to have received the tablets of the Law on that mountain. The monastery was dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, who was martyred in AD 307. The Roman emperor ordered St. Catherine to be severely beaten and tied to a rolling spiked wheel for her refusal to renounce Christianity. When she survived the ordeal, the emperor ordered her beheaded.

When a delegation from St. Catherine Monastery visited Medina in AD 626, the Prophet personally granted a charter to the monks to protect Christians' rights and other non-Muslims. In the letter, the Prophet made it known to his followers that Christians had the right to freedom of religion. The copy of this letter with the handprint of the Prophet is still preserved in the library at the monastery. The following summarizes this vital document.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION GUARANTEED FOR CHRISTIANS

This is a letter issued by Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the Messenger, the Prophet, the Faithful. It is sent to all the people as a trust on God's part to all His creatures that they may have no plea against God hereafter. Verily, God is Omnipotent, the Wise.

This letter is directed to the embracers of Islam as a covenant given to the followers of Jesus the Nazarene in the East and West, the far and near, the Arabs and foreigners, the known and the unknown.

MUSLIMS WHO VIOLATE THIS COVENANT ARE DISBELIEVERS

This letter contains the oath given to them. He who disobeys that which is therein will be considered a disbeliever and a transgressor to that where unto he is commanded. He will be regarded as one who has corrupted God's oath, disbelieved His Testament, rejected His Authority, despised His Religion, and made himself deserving of His curse, whether he is a Sultan or any other believer of Islam.

MUSLIMS PROTECT CHRISTIANS

Whenever Christian monks, devotees, and pilgrims gather, whether in a mountain or valley, or den, or frequented places, or plain, or churches, or in houses of worship, verily we are [at the] back of them to protect them and their properties. Protection provided by myself, my friends, and assistants, for they are my citizens and under my protection.

They shall not be imposed upon to undertake a journey or be forced to fight or carry arms, for Muslims must protect them and defend them against others. No one is allowed to plunder Christians, destroy or spoil any of their churches or houses of worship, or take any of the things contained within these houses and bring them to the houses of Islam. And he who takes away anything from there will corrupt God's oath and, in truth, disobeyed His Messenger.

INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY FOR CHRISTIANS

Their judges should not be changed or prevented from performing their duties. No one has the right to interfere with their affairs or take action against them.

PEACE AND TRANQUILITY FOR MONKS

The monks should not be disturbed in exercising their religious order. The people of seclusion should not be stopped from dwelling in their cells. I shall exempt them from that which may disturb them, of the burdens paid by others as an oath of allegiance.

EXEMPT FROM TAXATION

They must not give anything of their income but that which pleases them—they must not be offended, disturbed, or coerced or compelled. Jizya should not be levied upon their judges, monks, and those whose occupation is God's worship, nor is any other thing to be taken from them, whether it be a fine, a tax, or any unjust right. No fees or tithes should be received from those who devote themselves to God's worship in the mountains or in the Holy Land. Verily, this is for aught else and not for them; instead, in the seasons of crops, they should be given a Kadah for each Ardab of wheat (about five bushels and a half) as provision for them, and no one has the right to say to them 'this is too much,' or ask them to pay any tax. As to those who possess properties, the wealthy and merchants, the poll tax to be taken from them must not exceed twelve drachmas a head per year (about USD 200 today).

RESPECT AND FAVORED STATUS FOR CHRISTIANS

Do not dispute or argue with them but deal according to the verse recorded in the Quran: "Do not dispute or argue with the People of the Book but in that which is best" (29:46). Thus, they will live favored and protected from everything which may offend them by the Callers to religion [Islam], wherever they may be, and in any place, they may dwell.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN

Should any Christian woman be married to a Muslim, such marriage must not occur except with her consent. She must not be prevented

from attending to her church for prayer. Their churches must be honored, and they must not be withheld from building churches or repairing convents.

COMPACT TILL THE END OF TIME

Verily I will keep their contract, wherever they may be, in the sea, on the land, in the East, West, North, or South. They are under my protection and the testament of my safety against all things they abhor. It is positively incumbent upon all followers of Islam not to contradict or disobey this oath until the Day of Resurrection and the end of the world.

(2) CHRISTIANS OF NAJLAN

A Christian delegation from Najran (Yemen) visited the Prophet at Medina in 630. Politics, the matters of State, and religion were the topics discussed. Except for Jesus' nature, both parties agreed on other issues.

And if anyone argues with thee about this [truth] after all the knowledge that has come unto thee, say: "Come! Let us summon our sons and your sons, and our women, and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, and then let us pray [together] humbly and ardently and let us invoke Allah's curse upon those [of us] who are telling a lie." Behold, this is indeed the truth, and there is no deity whatsoever save Allah; and, verily, Allah - He alone - is almighty, truly wise. And if they turn away [from this truth] - behold, Allah has full knowledge of the spreaders of corruption. (3:61-63)

These verses were revealed in a discussion between the Prophet and a visiting delegation of Christians of Najran. Although they refused the "trial through prayer" (*mubahalah*) proposed by the Prophet, he accorded them a treaty guaranteeing all their civic rights and the free exercise of their religion. In return for a specified amount of

taxes and a variety of services, the people of Najran were granted a treaty, a copy preserved by an early historian: “They are entitled to the protection of God and the security of Muhammad the Prophet, the Messenger of God, which security shall involve their persons, religion, lands, and possessions—including those of them who are absent as well as those who are present with their camels, messengers, and images [church pictures and crosses]. The status they hold shall not be changed, nor shall their religious services or images be altered. No attempt shall be made to remove a bishop, monk, or sexton of a church from his office, whether great or small under the control of each. These Christians shall not be held responsible for any wrong deed or bloodshed in pre-Islamic time. They shall neither be called to military service nor compelled to pay the tithes.”

These are shining examples of how God's Prophet treated Christians. Christians are persecuted in Islamic lands. Ignorance is our common enemy.

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