



## Al-Muddaththir

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

### Name

The Surah takes its name from the word *al-muddaththir* in the first verse. This is also only a name, not a title of its subject matter.

### Period of Revelation

The first seven verses of this Surah belong to the earliest period at Makkah. Even according to some traditions which have been related in Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Musnad Ahmad, etc. on the authority of Jabir bin Abdullah, these are the very early verses of the Quran to be revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him). But the Muslim ummah almost unanimously agreed that the earliest revelation to the Prophet (peace be upon him) consisted of the first five verses of Surah Al-Alaq. However, what is established by authentic traditions is that after this first revelation, no revelation came down to the Prophet (peace be upon him) for quite some time. Then, when it was resumed, it started with these verses of Surah Al-Muddaththir. Imam Zuhri has given the following details of it: Revelation to the Prophet (peace be upon him)

remained suspended for quite some time, and it was such a period of deep grief and distress for him that he started going early to the tops of the mountains to throw himself down from them. But whenever he stood on the edge of a peak, the Angel Gabriel would appear and tell him that he was Allah's Prophet. This would console him and restore to him full peace of mind. (Ibn Jarir).

After this Imam Zuhri relates the following tradition on the authority of Jabir bin Abdullah: The Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah describing the period of *fatrat al-wahi* (break in revelation) said: One day when I was passing on the way, I suddenly heard a call from heaven. I raised my head and saw that the same Angel who had visited me in the cave of Hira was sitting on a throne between heaven and earth. This struck terror in my heart, and reaching home quickly, I said: Cover me up, cover me up. So the people of the house covered me up with a quilt (or blanket). At that time Allah sent down the revelation: *Ya ayyuhal-Muddaththiru...* From then on revelation became intense and continuous. (Bukhari, Muslim Musnad Ahmad, Ibn Jarir).

The rest of the Surah (verses 8-56) was revealed when the first Hajj season came after public preaching of Islam had begun in Makkah. This has been fully described in the Sirah by Ibn Hisham and we shall cite it below.

### Theme and Subject Matter

As has been explained above, the earliest revelation to the Prophet (peace be upon him) consisted of the first five verses of Surah Al-Alaq, in which it had been said: Read (O

Prophet) in the name of your Lord, Who created: Created man from a clot of congealed blood. Read: And your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught knowledge by the pen, taught man what he did not know.

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

In the implementation of this divine command when the Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah began to preach Islam and recite the Quranic Surahs revealed successively,

the people of Makkah felt alarmed, and it provoked a great storm of opposition and hostility. A few months passed in this state until the Hajj season approached. The people of Makkah feared that if Muhammad (peace be upon him) started visiting the caravans of the pilgrims coming from all over Arabia at their halting places and reciting the spell binding and unique revelations of the Quran in their assemblies on the occasion of Hajj, his message would reach every part of Arabia and influence countless people. Therefore, the Quraish chiefs held a conference and settled that they would start a propaganda campaign against the Prophet (peace be upon him) among the pilgrims as soon as they arrived.

After they had agreed on this, Walid bin alMughirah said to the assembled people: If you said contradictory things about Muhammad (peace be upon him), we all would lose our trust among the people. Therefore, let us agree upon one opinion, which we should all say without dispute.

Some people said that they would call Muhammad (peace be upon him) a soothsayer. Walid said: No, by God, he is not a soothsayer. We have seen the soothsayers: what they murmur and what they utter has no remote resemblance with the Quran.

Some other people said: Then we say he is possessed. Walid said: He is not a possessed one: We have seen mad and insane people; the way one talks disjointedly and behaves foolishly in that state is known to all: Who would believe that what Muhammad (peace be upon him) presented was the incoherent speech of a madman.

The people said: Then we say he is a poet. Walid said: No, he is not a poet, for we know poetry in all its forms, and what he presents conforms to no form of it.

The people said: Then he is a sorcerer. Walid said: He is no sorcerer either: We have seen sorcerers and we also know what methods they adopt for their sorcery. This also does not apply to Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Then he said: Whichever of these things you said about Muhammad (peace be upon him), it would be known to be a false accusation. By God, his speech is sweet, his root is deep and his branches are fruitful. At this Abu Jahl urging on Walid said: Your people will never be pleased with you unless you say something about Muhammad (peace be upon him). He said: Let me think over it awhile.

Then, after prolonged thought and consideration, he said: The nearest thing to the truth is that you tell the Arabs that he is a sorcerer, who has brought a message by which he separates a man from his father, and from his brother, and from his wife and children, and from his family. They all agreed on what Walid had proposed.

Then, according to a scheme the men of Quraish spread among the pilgrims in the Hajj season and they warned everyone about the sorcery of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and of his stirring up divisions in the families by it. But the result was that by their this plan the Quraish chiefs themselves made the name of the Messenger (peace be upon him) known throughout Arabia. (Ibn Hisham, pp. 288-289, what Walid had made this proposal on the insistence of Abu Jahl has been related by Ibn Jarir in his Tafsir on the

authority of Ikrimah).

This same event has been reviewed and commented upon in the second section of this Surah. The sequence of its contents is as follows:

In verses 8-10 the deniers of truth have been warned, saying: You will see the evil result of what you are doing today on the Resurrection Day.

In verses 11-26, without naming Walid bin alMughirah, it has been told how Allah had blessed him and how inimical he proved to be to true faith. In this connection, his mental conflict has been portrayed, telling that, on the one hand, he was fully convinced of the truth of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Quran, but, on the other hand, he did not want to risk his leadership and position among his people. Therefore, not only he did not believe himself but after a long-drawn-out conflict with his conscience he also came out with the proposal that in order to restrain the people from believing the Quran should be branded as magic. After exposing his evil nature, it has been said: Notwithstanding such evil inclinations and misdeeds, this person desires that he should be further blessed, whereas he has now become worthy of Hell, and never of further blessings.

In verses 27-48, the dreadfulness of Hell has been depicted and it has been explained as to people of what character and morals really deserve it.

In verses 49-53, the root cause of the disbelievers' aversion has been pointed out, saying: Since they are fearless of the Hereafter, and look upon this worldly life as an end in

itself, they flee from the Quran as though they were wild donkeys fleeing away from the lion. Therefore, they propose unreasonable conditions for believing, whereas even if each and every condition of theirs was fulfilled, they could not advance even an inch on the way of faith with their denial of the Hereafter.

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

1. O you (Muhammad) enveloped (in garments).<sup>\*1</sup>

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ

<sup>\*1</sup> A study of the background of the revelation of these verses given in the introduction above can help one understand why the Prophet (peace be upon him) on this occasion has been addressed with *Ya ayyuhal-Muddaththiru* instead of *Ya ayyuhar-Rasulu* (O Messenger), or *Ya ayyuhan-Nabiyyu* (O Prophet). As the Prophet (peace be upon him) had been terrified when he had suddenly seen the Angel Gabriel, sitting on a throne between heaven and earth, and had returned hastily home and asked the people of the house to cover him up, so Allah addressed him with *Ya ayyuhal-Muddaththiru*. From this fine way of address the meaning which automatically follows is: O My dear

servant, why have you lain down thus enwrapped? You have been put under the burden of a great mission: you must now arise from your solitude to perform this mission with resolution and courage.

2. Arise and warn.\*<sup>2</sup>

قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ

\*<sup>2</sup> A command of this very nature had been given to the prophet Noah (peace be upon him) while appointing him to the office of Prophethood: Warn the people of your nation before they are overtaken by a painful torment. (Surah Nooh, Ayat 1) The verse means: O you who lays enwrapped, stand up and arouse the people who live in heedlessness around you. Warn them of the fate which would certainly overtake them if they remained involved in the same heedlessness. Warn them that they are not living in a lawless kingdom where they are free to conduct themselves as they like and where they can do wherever they please without any fear or being called to account for it.

3. And proclaim the greatness of your Lord.\*<sup>3</sup>

وَرَبِّكَ فَكْبِّرْ

\*<sup>3</sup> This is the primary duty of a Prophet (peace be upon him), which he has to perform in this world. His foremost duty is to refute the greatness of all those whom the ignorant people might be holding as great, and publicly proclaim that the greatness in this universe belongs to none but Allah alone. For this very reason the phrase *Allahu Akbar* has been held as of supreme importance in Islam. The *adhan* (call to prayer) begins with the proclamation of

*Allahu Akbar*. The Muslim enters the Prayer itself with *Allahu Akbar* and repeats *Allahu Akbar* every time he sits or stands, He also pronounces *Bismillahi Allahu Akbar* when slaughtering an animal. The slogan of *Allahu Akbar* has become a most distinctive and prominent emblem of Muslims throughout the world today, for the Prophet (peace be upon him) of this ummah himself had embarked on his mission with the magnification and glorification of Almighty Allah. Here, there is another fine point, which must be understood well. As we have learned from the background of the revelation of these verses, this was the first occasion when the Prophet (peace be upon him) had been commanded to arise for performing the duties of the great mission of Prophethood, and it was obvious that the city and society in which he was commanded to perform this mission, was the centre of polytheism. Not only were the people around him polytheistic like the common Arabs but, more than that, the city of Makkah had become the most sacred place of pilgrimage for the polytheistic Arabs, and the Quraish were its attendants. Arising of a person in such a place all by himself and proclaiming the Oneness of God in the face of polytheism was full of risks. That is why the exhortation to proclaim the greatness of your Lord just after arise and warn contains this meaning also: Do not at all mind the terrifying and dreadful forces that seem to be obstructing and impeding your work and proclaim publicly that your Lord is the greatest of all those who can hinder and resist you from giving your message. This is indeed the greatest encouragement for a person who embarks on a

divine mission. The one who has Allah's greatness and majesty deeply embedded in his heart will feel no hesitation at all in facing and fighting the entire world by himself for the sake of Allah.

4. And keep your garments pure.\*4

وَتِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ

\*4 These are very comprehensive words, which are full of meaning. They mean this: Keep your garments free from every filth and impurity, for the purity of the body and garments and the purity of the spirit are inter-linked and inter-dependent. A pure spirit and an impure body with impure garments cannot live together. The society in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) had arisen with the invitation to Islam, was not only steeped in the evils of unbelief and immorality, but was also devoid of even the most elementary concepts of purity and cleanliness, and the Prophet's (peace be upon him) task was to teach its members cleanliness in every way of life. Therefore he was instructed to establish and present a high standard of purity in his external life as well. Thus, it is the result of the same instruction that the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave mankind such detailed teaching about the cleanliness of the body and garments as is not possessed even by the most civilized nations of today, not to speak of the Arabs of the pre-Islamic days of ignorance. So much so that in most of the languages of the world there is no word synonymous with *taharat*. On the contrary, in Islam every book of the Hadith and Fiqh begins with injunctions and instructions on *taharat* (purity), which distinguishes between purity and

impurity and gives minute details about the methods and means of obtaining purity. The second meaning of these words is: Keep your garments neat and clean. The criterion of religiosity given to the world by the monastic concepts was that a man was holy to the extent he was unclean. If a person happened to put on neat clothes, he was looked upon as a worldly man, whereas the fact is that human nature abhors filth and uncleanness and even a person of ordinary fine taste loves to be associated only with a neat and clean person. On this very basis, for the one calling the people to Allah it was made imperative that externally he should also look so neat and clean that the people should regard him with esteem and his personality should not be stained in any way so as to repel others. The third meaning of this divine command is: Keep your garments free from moral evils: your dress should be neat and clean but it should bear no tinge of vanity and pride, display and exhibition, pomp and show. The dress is the first thing that introduces the personality of a person to others. The kind of dress a person wears makes the people judge at first sight what kind of a man he is. The dresses of the rulers and princes, the dresses of the religious functionaries, the dresses of the vain and conceited people, the dresses of the mean and shallow people, the dresses of the evil-natured and characterless people, all represent the tastes and tempers of those who wear them. The temper of the one calling to Allah is naturally different from all such people. Therefore, his dress should also necessarily be different from all of them. He should wear such a dress as should

make everyone else feel that he is a noble and refined person, who is not involved in any evil of the self. Its fourth meaning is: Keep away from moral evils. Ibn Abbas, Ibrahim Nakhai, Shabi, Ata, Mujahid. Qatadah, Saeed bin Jubair, Hasan Basri and other major commentators have given this very meaning to this verse: keep yourself morally pure and avoid all that is blameworthy. Also in Arabic usage when it is said: So and so is clean in his garments, it implies that he is morally good and pure; on the contrary, when it is said: He is filthy in his garments, it means that he is dishonest and fraudulent in his dealings: he is unreliable.

5. And avoid un-  
cleanliness.\*5

وَالرُّجْزَ فَاهْجُرْ

\*5 Un-cleanliness implies every kind of filth, whether of belief and thought, of morals and deeds, of the body, dress or mode of life. The verse means: Keep yourself free from the filth of evils which are prevalent in society around you: no one should ever impute to you the blame that your own life itself is stained in some degree with the evils that you tell others to avoid.

6. And do not confer favor  
(expecting) to get more.\*6

وَلَا تَمُنَّ تَسْتَكْثِرُ

\*6 The words *wala tamnun tastakthir* in the original are so vast in meaning that no one sentence can convey their full sense in translation. Their one meaning is: Whomever you favor, you should favor him without any selfish motive. Your bestowal of an endowment and donation, your generosity and good treatment should be only for the sake of Allah: there should be no trace in it of the desire that you

should receive any worldly gains in return for the favor done. In other words, do good to others for the sake of Allah, not for seeking any benefits. The second meaning is: Although the mission of Prophethood that you are performing is a great favor in itself, for the people are obtaining true guidance because of it, do not remind the people of this favor, nor try to obtain any personal benefits from it. The third meaning is: Although you are performing a great service, you should never gloat over it, nor should ever have the idea that by performing your prophetic duties, at the risk of life, you are doing any favor to your Lord.

7. And be patient for (the sake of) your Lord.\*7

وَلِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ

\*7 That is, the task that is being entrusted to you is full of hazards: you will meet with great hardships and difficulties and troubles on this way: even your own people will turn hostile against you and the whole of Arabia will become your enemy. Yet you should endure with patience, for the sake of your Lord, whatever you may have to face in this way, and carry out all your duties firmly and resolutely. Fear, greed, friendship, enmity, love, all these will hinder your way, but you should stand your ground firmly and steadfastly. These were the very preliminary instructions which Allah gave His Messenger (peace be upon him) at the time when He commanded him to arise and start the work of Prophethood. If a person ponders over these brief sentences and their meaning his heart will testify that no better instructions could be given to a Prophet at the

commencement of his prophetic mission. In these he was told what he was required to do, what kind of life, morals and dealings he should adopt, and taught with what intention, mentality and mode of thought he should go about his mission and also forewarned what kind of conditions he would meet with in the performance of his mission and how he would have to face and overcome them. Today the people who, blinded by their prejudices, say that these words were, God forbid, uttered by the Prophet (peace be upon him) during epileptic fits, should study these sentences carefully and judge for themselves whether these are the product of any epileptic fits, or the instructions of a God, which He gave to His servant while appointing him to the mission of Apostleship.

8. Then, when the Trumpet is blown.

فَإِذَا نُقِرَ فِي النَّاقُورِ

9. That day shall be a hard Day.\*8

فَذَلِكَ يَوْمٌ مِّدٍ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ

\*8 As already explained in the introduction, this part of the Surah was sent down a few months after the initial verses when at the beginning of the first ever Hajj season, after the advent of Islam, the Quraish chiefs decided in a conference to start a powerful propaganda campaign to dissuade the outsiders, who came to visit the Kabah, from the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In these verses, this very scheming of the Quraish has been reviewed, and the review has begun with the words, as if to say: You may act as you please, but even if you succeed in achieving your object by these devices in the world, how

will you save yourselves from your evil end on the Day when the Trumpet will be sounded and Resurrection will be established. (For explanation of the Trumpet, see E.N. 47 of Surah Al-Anaam; E.N. 57 of Surah Ibrahim; E.N. 78 of Surah TaHa; E.N. 1 of Surah Al-Hajj; E.Ns 46, 47 of Surah YaSin, E.N. 79 of Surah Az-Zumar; E.N. 52 of Surah Qaf).

**10.** For the disbelievers, not easy. <sup>\*9</sup>

عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ

**\*9** These words by themselves support the conclusion that that Day will be light for the believers, and its hardships will be specially intended only for the deniers of the truth. Moreover, these words also contain the meaning that the severity of that Day will be of an enduring and permanent nature for disbelievers, it will not be a severity which might be expected to become mild with the passage of time.

**11.** Leave Me and the whom <sup>\*10</sup> I created alone: <sup>\*11</sup>

ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا

**\*10** The address is directed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and it means: O Prophet, leave the case of the person (Walid bin al-Mughirah) to Me, who in the disbelievers' conference proposed that you should be branded as a sorcerer among the pilgrims coming from different parts of Arabia; it is now for Me to deal with him; you need not bother yourself about it at all.

**\*11** This sentence can have two meanings and both are correct:

(1) That when I created him, he was not at that time born with any wealth and children and position of authority and

chieftainship.

(2) That I alone was his Creator: those other gods whose godhead he is so ardently trying to keep established and is opposing your invitation to One God for the same object, were not My associates in creating him.

12. And to whom I granted wealth in abundance.

وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَالًا مَّمْدُودًا

13. And sons present (with him).<sup>\*12</sup>

وَبَنِينَ شُهُودًا

<sup>\*12</sup> Walid bin al-Mughirah had ten or twelve sons of whom Khalid bin Walid became most famous. For these sons the word *shuhud* has been used, which can have several meanings:

(1) That they do not have to run about and go abroad in search of their livelihood: they have enough provisions at home; therefore, they can always remain at the beck and call of their father.

(2) That all his sons are prominent and influential people: they sit in assemblies and conferences with him.

(3) That they are the people of high rank and position and their testimony is accepted in all matters of life.

14. And made for him (life) smooth (easy).

وَمَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا

15. Yet he desires that I should give him more.<sup>\*13</sup>

ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ

<sup>\*13</sup> Its one meaning is that there is still no end to his greed. In spite of having all this he still desires that he should be granted every good thing of the world. Another meaning

which Hasan Basri, and some other scholars have given is: He used to say: If what Muhammad (peace be upon him) says is really true that there is another life after death, and there will be a Paradise also in it, then that Paradise too has been prepared for me.

16. Nay, indeed, he has been stubborn to Our verses.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ كَانَ لِآيَاتِنَا عَنِيدًا ﴿١٦﴾

17. I shall soon impose on him a hard ascent (severe torment).

سَأَرْهِقُهُ صَعُودًا ﴿١٧﴾

18. Indeed, he pondered and devised a plan.

إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ ﴿١٨﴾

19. So may he be destroyed, how he devised a plan.

فَقِيلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٩﴾

20. Then, may he be destroyed, how he devised a plan.

ثُمَّ قِيلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿٢٠﴾

21. Then he looked around.

ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ﴿٢١﴾

22. Then he frowned and scowled.

ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَسَرَ ﴿٢٢﴾

23. Then he turned his back and showed arrogance.

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَأَسْتَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾

24. Then he said: "This is nothing but magic, (handed down) from the past."

فَقَالَ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ يُورَثُ ﴿٢٤﴾

25. This is nothing but the word of a mortal. \*14

إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٥﴾

**\*14** The reference is to what happened in the conference of the disbelievers of Makkah. From the details of it that we have given in the introduction, it becomes obvious that this man in his heart had become fully convinced of the Quran's being divine word, but in order to save his position as a chief of his people, he was not prepared to affirm faith. When in the conference he himself turned down all the accusations that the Quraish chiefs were proposing against the Prophet (peace be upon him), he was compelled to devise an accusation from himself, which could be spread among the Arabs in order to bring a bad name to the Prophet (peace be upon him). Then, the way he struggled against his conscience, and the way he devised an accusation at last after a prolonged mental conflict, has been vividly depicted here.

**26. I shall cast him into Hell.**

سَأُصَلِّيهِ سَقَرَ ﴿٢٦﴾

**27. And what do you know what Hell is.**

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سَقَرٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

**28. It leaves nothing and it spares none.\*15**

لَا تُقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ ﴿٢٨﴾

**\*15** This can have two meanings: first, that it will burn to ashes whoever is cast into it, but even after death he will not escape from punishment: he will be given life once again and burnt once again, This very subject has been treated at another place thus: He will neither die in it nor live. (Surah Al-Aala, Ayat 13). Another meaning can also be: It will leave none who has deserved the punishment and it will spare none from being punished.

29. It scorches the man.\*16

لَوَّاحَةٌ لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٩﴾

\*16 After saying that it will leave nothing of the body unconsumed, making mention of scorching of the skin separately seems to be somewhat unnecessary. But this form of the punishment has been mentioned separately in particular because it is the skin of a man's face and body which actually makes his personality prominent, and it is its ugliness which makes him feel most ill at ease. He is not so grieved at the internal troubles of his body as, for instance, at his face being ugly, or that there should be spots on the skin of the exposed parts of his body, abhorrent to others. That is why it has been said: If the people who feel proud of their personalities in the world because of having handsome faces and splendid bodies, treat the revelations of Allah mockingly, as did Walid bin al-Mughirah, their faces will be scorched and their skins will be burned black.

30. Over it are nineteen (angels).

عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ ﴿٣٠﴾

31. And We have not appointed\*17 the keepers of the Fire except angels.\*18 And We have not made their number except as a trial for those who disbelieve.\*19 That those who were given the Scripture are convinced,\*20 and those who have believed

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيَقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزِدَّادَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا

are increased in (their) faith.\*21 And will not doubt those who were given the Scripture, and the believers. And that those in whose heart is a disease,\*22 and the disbelievers may say: “What does Allah intend by this as a parable.”\*23 Thus does Allah lead astray whom He wills,\*24 and guides whom He wills. And none knows the hosts of your Lord except Him.\*25

And this is not but a reminder to mankind.\*26

إِيْمَانًا وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ  
 أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ  
 وَلَيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ  
 مَرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ  
 اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا ۗ كَذَلِكَ  
 يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي  
 مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ  
 رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۗ وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا  
 ذِكْرٌ لِلْبَشَرِ



\*17 The whole passage from here to “none knows the hosts of your Lord but He Himself”, is a parenthetical sentence, which has been inserted here to answer an objection of the disbelievers, who had started mocking it when they heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) say that 19 keepers had been appointed over Hell. Their objection was: How strange that, on the one hand, we are told that all human beings, from the time of the Prophet Adam till Resurrection, who disbelieved and committed evil, will be cast into Hell, and, on the other hand, that there will be only 19 keepers, who will administer punishment to the countless numbers of men in such a huge Hell. This caused

a huge laughter among the chiefs of Quraish. Abu Jahl said: Brothers, are you so powerless that even as many as ten of you at a time will not be able to overpower a single policeman of Hell. At this a wrestler of the Bani Jumha said: Well I will deal with and overpower at least 17 of them by myself; as for the remaining two, you all together can tackle them. In response these sentences have been inserted as a parenthetical clause.

**\*18** That is, it is foolish on your part to compare the angelic powers to human powers. They will be angels, not men, and you cannot imagine what tremendous powers Allah has granted to the angels He has created.

**\*19** That is, although apparently there was no need to mention the number of the keepers of Hell, yet We have mentioned it so that it becomes a trial for every such person who may be concealing any kind of unbelief in his heart. Such a man may be making a great display of his faith but if he conceals even a tinge of the doubt about the Godhead and supreme powers of God, or about revelation and Prophethood, anywhere in his heart, his disbelief would immediately be exposed as soon as he would hear that only 19 policemen would control countless numbers of the culprits from among the jinn and men in such a huge jail and would also administer punishment to each of them individually.

**\*20** Some commentators have explained it thus: As in the scriptures of the Jews and Christians, the same number of the angels has also been mentioned as keepers of Hell, they would be convinced of this thing's being truly from Allah as

soon as they heard it. But in our opinion this commentary is not correct for two reasons. First, we have not been able to see anywhere in the existing scriptures of the Jews and Christians in spite of search that the number of the angels appointed over Hell is 19. Second, there are many things in the Quran, which have also been mentioned in the scriptures of the Jews and Christians, yet they explain them away, saying that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has plagiarized these from their books. For these reasons the correct meaning of this statement in our opinion is: The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) knew that he would be ridiculed as soon as the disbelievers heard that 19 angels had been appointed over Hell, but in spite of this, he presented without the least hesitation and fear publicly before the people what had been revealed to him from Allah, and did not at all mind the jesting and mocking by the people. The pagans of Arabia were unaware of the unique distinction of the Prophets, but the followers of the earlier scriptures were fully aware that the Prophets in every age used to convey to their people intact whatever they received from God, whether it pleased them or displeased them. On this very basis it was to be expected of the Jews and the Christians that they would be convinced of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) truth for only a Prophet could present an apparently strange thing without any hesitation before the people in an environment charged with antagonism and hostility. This is also evident that such a thing was shown by the Prophet (peace be upon him) on many other occasions. Its most

prominent example is the event of the *miraj* (ascension) which he related openly before a general assembly of the disbelievers and did not at all care how his opponents would behave and react after they had heard the story of the wonderful event.

**\*21** It has been explained at several places in the Quran that on the occasion of every trial when a believer remains steadfast to his faith, and forsaking the way of doubt and denial, disobedience or disloyalty to the faith, adopts the way of faith, obedience and loyalty to it, it increases and strengthens him all the more in faith and resignation (For explanation, see Surah Aal-Imran, Ayat 173; Surah Al-Anfal, Ayat 2; Surah At-Taubah, Ayats 124-125; Surah Al-Ahzab, Ayat 22; Surah Al-Fath, Ayat 4 and the corresponding E.Ns).

**\*22** As sickness of the heart in the Quran is generally understood to imply hypocrisy, seeing this word here some commentators have expressed the view that this verse was revealed at Al-Madinah, for the hypocrites appeared at Al-Madinah. But this view is not correct for several reasons. In the first place, the assertion itself that there were no hypocrites at Makkah is false, and its falsehood has been exposed in the Introduction to the Surah Al-Ankabut and in its verses 10-11. Secondly, in our opinion it is not a correct way of writing commentary that in respect of a certain sentence occurring in a particular discourse which was revealed on a particular occasion, under particular circumstances, one should declare that it had been sent down on another occasion but has been inserted here

without any relevance. The historical background of this part of Surah Al-Muddaththir is well known to us from authentic traditions. This was revealed in connection with a particular event of the early period of the life at Makkah. The whole context bears full relevance to the event. What could, therefore, be the occasion in this context that this one sentence, if it was revealed many years later at Al-Madinah, should have been inserted here? As for the question what is implied by the disease of the heart here, its answer is that it implies the disease of doubt. Not only in Makkah but in the entire world there have been, and are, very few such people, who might deny God, Hereafter, Revelation, Prophethood, Heaven, Hell, etc. absolutely. In every age the greater majority by far has been of those people, who have been involved in the doubt whether there is God, or no God, Hereafter or no Hereafter, whether Heaven and Hell really exist, or are mere figments of the imagination, and whether the Messengers did really come and receive revelation or not. This same doubt has led most people to unbelief, otherwise the number of such people in the world who denied these truths absolutely has never been great. For a person who has any common sense knows that there is no rational ground whatever for denying the possibility of the existence of these things, or of declaring them absolutely impossible.

**\*23** This does not mean that they accepted it as divine word but wondered why Allah had said such a thing. But what they actually meant was: A discourse which contained such an irrational and impossible thing could not be a revelation

from Allah.

**\*24** That is, Allah in this very way sometimes sends down in the course of His revelations and commandments such things as become a means of test and trial for the people. It is one and the same thing which a truth-loving, good-natured and right-minded person hears and understanding its right meaning in the right way and adopts the straight path. But when heard by an obstinate, perverse and willful wrongdoer, makes him to misconstrue it and make it a new excuse for fleeing from the truth. Since the first man is himself a lover of the truth, Allah grants him guidance, for it is not the way of Allah to lead the seekers after truth forcibly astray. And since the second man himself does not want guidance, but chooses only error for himself, Allah also pushes him on to the way of error and deviation, for it is also not the way of Allah to forcibly pull to the way of the truth him who has an aversion to the truth. (The question of Allah's granting guidance and misguidance has been fully explained at many places for example, see E.Ns 10, 16, 19, 20 of Surah Al-Baqarah; E.N. 173 of Surah An-Nisa; E.Ns 17, 28, 90 of Surah Al-Anaam; E.N. 13 of Surah Yunus; E.N. 54 of Surah Al-Kahf; E.N. 71 of Surah Al-Qasas).

**\*25** That is, none knows but Allah what different kinds and how many of the creatures He has created in the universe, what powers He has granted them, and what services He is taking from them. If the man clinging to the tiny globe of the earth seeing the tiny world around himself with his limited sight, is involved in the misunderstanding that the

universe of God contains nothing but what he can perceive by his senses or by his instruments, this would only be his own shortsightedness, otherwise this universe is so vast and limitless that it is not in the power of man to obtain full knowledge about any of the things here, not to speak of comprehending mentally the concept of all its vastnesses.

**\*26** The people may take heed: the people may recover their senses and wake up before they make themselves worthy of Hell and suffer its punishment, and should think of saving themselves from it.

**32.** No, never!<sup>\*27</sup> By the moon.

كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرَ

**\*27** That is, it is not a hollow thing which may be mocked like that.

**33.** And the night when it withdraws.

وَالَّيْلِ إِذَا دَبَّرَ

**34.** And by the morning when it dawns.

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ

**35.** Indeed, this is one of the mighty (things).<sup>\*28</sup>

إِنِّهَا لِأَحَدَى الْكُبْرَى

**\*28** That is, just as the moon and the night and the day are the great signs of the powers of Allah, so also is Hell a great sign of His powers. If the existence of the moon and the alternation of the night and day so regularly were not impossible, why should the existence of Hell be impossible as you think it is. You see these phenomena day and night; therefore, they do not surprise you: otherwise these things in themselves also are great marvels of the powers of Allah.

If you had not observed them and somebody were to tell you that there is also such a thing as the moon in the world, or, there is a sun which leaves the world dark when it hides and makes the world shine forth with light when it appears, then the people like you would have made jests of it too as you make jests of Hell.

36. A warning to mankind.

نَذِيرًا لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣٦﴾

37. Unto whoever of you who desires to go forward or to stay behind.<sup>\*29</sup>

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ ﴿٣٧﴾

\*29 That is, the people have been warned to this effect. Now, let him who heeds the warning go forward on the right way, and let him who wills still lag behind.

38. Every person is a pledge what it has earned.<sup>\*30</sup>

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

\*30 For explanation, see E.N. 16 of Surah At-Toor.

39. Except the people of the right hand.

إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٣٩﴾

40. In Gardens, they will ask one another.<sup>\*31</sup>

فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

\*31 In other words, the people of the left hand will be seized in consequence of their misdeeds, but the people of the right hand will have their debts settled. (For explanation of the people of the right hand and the left hand, see E.Ns 5, 6 of Surah Al-Waqiah).

41. About the criminals.<sup>\*32</sup>

عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

**\*32** At several places in the Quran, it has been stated that the dwellers of Paradise and the dwellers of Hell will be able to see and communicate with each other directly without the agency of any instrument whenever they will so desire, although they will be living hundreds of thousands of miles away from each other. For instance, see Surah Al-Aaraf, Ayats 44-50 and E.N. 35; Surah As-Saaffat, Ayats 50-57 and E.N. 32 on it.

**42.** "What has brought you into Hell?"

مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

**43.** They will reply, "We were not of those who offered the salat."<sup>\*33</sup>

قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ

﴿٤٣﴾

**\*33** That is, we were not of those who after having believed in Allah and His Messenger and His Book, performed the foremost duty imposed by Allah, i.e. the Prayer. Here, it should be understood well that unless a person has believed he cannot offer the Prayer at all. Therefore, one's being of those who performed the Prayer, by itself implies that one is a believer. But by attributing one's going to Hell to his not being of those who performed their Prayer, it has been made explicit that one cannot escape Hell even after having believed if he does not perform his Prayers regularly.

**44.** "Nor were we of those who fed the poor."<sup>\*34</sup>

وَلَمْ نَكُ نَطْعِمُ الْمَسْكِينِ ﴿٤٤﴾

**\*34** This shows how grave a sin it is in Islam to see a hungry man and fail to feed him even if one can, for this has been particularly mentioned as one of the causes of

going to Hell.

45. “And we used to talk vain with those who indulged in vain talk.”

وَكَُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ



46. And we used to deny the Day of Recompense.

وَكَُنَّا نَكْذِبُ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ



47. “Until there came to us (the death) the certainty.”<sup>\*35</sup>

حَتَّىٰ آتَيْنَا الْيَقِينَ



**\*35** Until the inevitable certainty overtakes: Until death came upon us. Here, the inevitable implies death as well as the Hereafter.

48. So shall not benefit them intercession of the intercessors.<sup>\*36</sup>

فَمَا تَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفَاعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ



**\*36** That is, even if an intercessor interceded for a person who persisted in this way of life till death, he would not be forgiven. The question of intercession has been fully explained at many places in the Quran that no one can have any difficulty in knowing and understanding as to who can intercede and who cannot, when one can intercede and when one cannot, for whom one can intercede and for whom one cannot, and for whom intercession is beneficial and for whom it is not. As one of the major causes of the people’s deviation in the world is their false concept about intercession, it has been explained at such length in the Quran as to leave no room for any doubt and ambiguity.

For example, see Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 255; Surah Al-Anaam, Ayat 94; Surah Al-Aaraf, Ayat 53; Surah Younus, Ayats 3-18; Surah Maryam, Ayat 87; Surah TaHa, Ayat 109; Surah Al-Anbiya, Ayat 28; Surah Saba, Ayat 23; Surah Az-Zumar, Ayats 43-44; Surah Al-Momin, Ayat 18; Surah Ad-Dukhan, Ayat 86; Surah An-Najm, Ayat 26; Surah An-Naba, Ayat 37-38.

49. Then what is (the matter) with them that from the reminder they turn away.

فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكَرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ



50. As if they were wild donkeys.

كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُسْتَنْفِرَةٌ

51. Fleeing away from a lion.\*37

فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ

\*37 This is an idiomatic expression in Arabic which depicts the character of wild donkeys who flee stupefied and stunned as soon as they smell a lion or hear a hunter.

52. But, each one of them desires that he should be given pages spread out.\*38

بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَى

صُحُفًا مُنشَرَّةً

\*38 That is, they desire that if Allah really has appointed Muhammad (peace be upon him) as His Prophet, He should send a letter to each one of the chiefs and elders of Makkah telling him that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is Allah's Prophet; therefore he should obey and follow him. And these letters should be such as may convince them that they have been written by Allah Himself. At another place in the

Quran, this saying of the disbelievers of Makkah has been cited: We will not believe in it unless we are given the like of what has been given to the Messengers of Allah. (Al-Anaam, Ayat 124). At still another place their this demand has been cited: Or you ascend the sky ... and bring down to us a writing that we may read. (Surah Bani Israil, Ayat 93).

**53.** Nay, but they do not fear the Hereafter.\*<sup>39</sup>

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا يَتَخَفُونَ الْآخِرَةَ



\*<sup>39</sup> That is, the real cause of their failure to affirm the faith is not that their demands are not fulfilled, but the real cause is that they are fearless of the Hereafter. They think that this world is an end in itself and they do not have any idea that there is another life after this worldly life in which they will have to render an account of their deeds. This very thing has made them careless and irresponsible in the world. They regard the question of truth and falsehood as utterly meaningless, for they do not see any truth following which may have necessarily led to a good result in the world, nor do they see any falsehood which might have always led to an evil result in the world. Therefore, they think it is useless merely to consider as to what is really true and what is false. This question can be worthy of serious consideration only for the person who regards the present life of the world as transitory and admits that the real and everlasting life is the life hereafter, where the truth will necessarily lead to a good result and falsehood necessarily to an evil result. Such a person will certainly

believe when he sees the rational arguments and the pure teachings presented in the Quran and will use his common sense to understand what is actually wrong with the beliefs and deeds which the Quran calls wrong. But the denier of the Hereafter who is not at all serious in his search for the truth, will present ever new demands every day for not believing, and will present a new excuse for his denial even if all his demands are fulfilled. This same thing has been expressed in Surah Al-Anaam, Ayat 7 thus: O Prophet, even if We had sent down to you a Book written on paper, and even if they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would have said: This is nothing but manifest sorcery.

54. Nay,<sup>\*40</sup> This indeed is an Admonition.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ تَذَكُّرٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

\*40 That is, no such demand of theirs will ever be fulfilled.

55. So let him, who wills take admonition.

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ ﴿٥٥﴾

56. And they will never take admonition except that Allah wills.<sup>\*41</sup> He is worthy to be feared,<sup>\*42</sup> and worthy to forgive.<sup>\*43</sup>

وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوَى وَأَهْلُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ ﴿٥٦﴾

\*41 That is, a person's taking heed does not wholly depend upon his own will, but he takes heed only when Allah also wills to grant him the grace to take heed. In other words, the truth that has been expressed here is that no act of man takes a concrete shape solely by his own will, but each act is implemented only when the will of God combines with the

will of the man. This is a very delicate question, failure to understand which has often made human thought falter. Briefly it can be understood thus: If in this world every man had the power to accomplish whatever he wanted to accomplish, the system of the world would be disturbed. This system continues to hold only because the will of Allah is dominant over all other wills. Man can accomplish whatever he wants to accomplish only when Allah also wills that he be allowed to accomplish it. The same is also the case with guidance and error. Only man's own desiring to have guidance is not enough for him to have guidance; he receives guidance only when Allah also takes a decision to fulfill his desire. Likewise, only man's desiring to go astray by itself is also not enough, but when Allah in view of his desire decides that he be allowed to wander into evil ways, then he wanders into the evil ways in which Allah allows him to wander. As for example, if a person wants to become a thief, only his desire is not enough that he may enter into any house he likes and walk away with whatever he likes, but he can fulfill his desire only at the time and to the extent and in the form that Allah allows him to fulfill it, according to His supreme wisdom and expedience.

**\*42** That is, the admonition being given to you to avoid Allah's displeasure is not for the reason that Allah needs it, and if you did not take it, Allah would be harmed, but you are being so admonished because it is Allah's right that His servants should seek His pleasure and good will and should avoid doing anything against His will.

**\*43** That is, it behoves only Allah that He should receive

into His mercy whoever desists from evil no matter how many acts of disobedience he might have committed in the past. Allah is not vengeful to His servants so that He may refuse to forgive their errors and be bent upon punishing them in any case.

