

CHAPTER 21 THE PROPHETS (AL-ANBIYA)

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Description: A warning, stories of the prophets, and good news for the believers.

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Introduction

Chapter 21, The Prophets, is one of the longer chapters of the Quran. It contains 112 verses and its title comes from the subject matter from verses 48 to 91, stories, and lessons from the lives of many of the more notable prophets. This chapter was revealed in Mecca and thus it stresses that Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was a human being like all the earlier prophets and that his message was the same, the oneness or unity of God. It also warns, as do many chapters, of the inevitability of the Day of Judgement.



Verses 1 – 9 Accusations and lies

God warns that the Day of Accountability is getting closer, yet many people are heedless. They ridicule the warnings and warners that come to them and continue to play, their hearts preoccupied with worldly affairs. In their private conversations, they say that Muhammad is a just human being like themselves, and that he is trying to trick them with witchcraft. God says to Prophet Muhammad, tell them that I (God) hear everything they think is said in secrecy. Many accuse Prophet Muhammad of having muddled dreams, or making up false stories, or being a poet. The disbelievers ask for a sign, but God mentions that all the cities and towns destroyed previously asked for and received signs yet they did not believe. The disbelievers dispute as to how a human being can be a prophet yet the previous prophets were all mortal men. God fulfilled His promise to them, they were saved, as were those who believed in them but many were destroyed for their disbelief.

Verses 10- 24 Falsehood blown away

We (God) have sent you a reminder. Prior nations were destroyed because of their iniquities. Other communities were raised up in their place. They tried to escape when they felt Our (Gods) wrath upon them. (They were told) Go back to your houses and play. They admitted their wrongdoing and continued to do so until they were extinguished, just like a fire. Heaven and earth and all that lies between them were not created to be a playground. Falsehood is blown away by the truth, so woe to those who have created false gods. Those who are with God worship and praise him tirelessly. Do your false deities have the power to raise the dead? There is proof and there is the reminder (the Quran) yet most people do not recognise the truth and turn away.

Verses 25- 47 Every soul will taste death

All the prophets were sent with the same message; there is no deity but God, so worship Him alone. Despite having received the true message people tell lies against God. These evil doers are rewarded with Hell. Do the disbelievers not consider the world around them? The heavens and the earth were once one mass split asunder by God; all living creatures have their origin in water. The earth is covered with firm mountains and broad pathways and the sky is a canopy. God created the night and the day; the celestial bodies move in their orbits. Every soul will taste death. Everyone is tested and then they will return to God. The Day will arrive suddenly and the disbelievers will be powerless to turn it away. The previous messengers were ridiculed but in the end those who ridiculed were overcome by what they mocked. Invented gods cannot defend themselves so how will they defend the disbelievers? They are warned but refuse to hear, and then if even a breath of punishment touches them they cry to God. Be warned that on the Day of Judgement the scales will be set up and God will take account.

Verses 48 – 70 Brief stories of the prophets

God says He gave Moses and his brother Aaron the scripture that distinguishes between right and wrong and the Quran is also a blessed message. God sends it down yet some people continue to deny it. Long ago right judgment was bestowed upon Abraham. He questioned his father and his people about their clear idolatry but they answered that they only followed the ways of their ancestors. Abraham said to them that their true Lord was the Lord of the heavens and the earth that had created them and that he (Abraham) would plot against the idols as soon as he could find the opportunity. Abraham destroyed all the idols except the largest one. He left it whole. When they returned to find the carnage the people remembered Abraham's threats so they called him and questioned him. He asked them to question instead the remaining idol, pointing out the absurdity of their beliefs. At first Abraham's people admitted their errors but then they were seized with pride and obstinacy. They threw Abraham into the midst of a fire but God kept the fire cool. They planned to hurt Abraham but God made them the losers.

Verses 71 – 77 God saves those who believe

Prophet Abraham and his nephew Lot were delivered from harm and sent to a land that God had blessed for the entire world. Here Abraham was blessed even more with his righteous son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. They were righteous, doing good deeds, establishing the prayer, giving alms and worshipping in the correct way. Lot was given sound judgment and knowledge and God saved him from the city of wicked deeds. Even further back in the past Noah called out to God and God accepted his prayer against the unbelievers. Prophet Noah and the believers were saved from the great calamity (the flood) but those who had denied the warnings were drowned.

Verses 78 – 88 ...And those who cry to Him in distress

God blessed Prophet David and Solomon with wisdom. God was watching them when they were trying to judge a case about sheep straying a night and He made Solomon understand the case in a better way. However both were given wisdom in abundance. It was God who made the mountains and the birds sing His (God's) praises with David and it was also God who taught David to make coats of armour for protection in battle. God harnessed the wind for Solomon and made some of the jinn subservient to him.

God asks us to remember Job, who cried to his Lord when he was afflicted. God heard his cry and removed his suffering. And remember Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu'l- Kifl. They were all steadfast and were admitted into God's mercy. And remember the man in the whale? He was angry but admitted his wrong and God saved him from his distress. God saves the faithful.

Verses 89 – 112 Great news for the believers

God blessed Zachariah and accepted his prayer for a child. He was given John (the Baptist). Remember the one who guarded her chastity (Mary, mother of Jesus). God made her and her son a sign for all people. God calls all the prophets a single community and says worship Me alone. If a believer does righteous deeds the angels will record it. Towards the end of time the people of Gog and Magog will be let loose to swarm across the land. On the Day of Judgement the eyes of the disbelievers will stare in horror and say, "We were wrong". But the people destined for Paradise will be kept far away from Hell; they will not even hear a sound of it. This day of great terror will not grieve them and the angels will greet them. Surely this is great news for the believers. My (God's) righteous servants will inherit the earth.

Muhammad has been sent as a blessing for all the worlds and was told to warn them (humankind) asking them to affirm their belief that God is one.

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