

CHAPTER 70, AL-MA'ARIJ (THE WAYS OF ASCENT)

Rating:

Description: God describes the Day of Judgment, including the different qualities and attitudes of both the believers and the disbelievers.

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Introduction

This forty-four verse chapter is named for the different paths and ways in which the angels ascend to God. These are mentioned in verses three and four. The Ways of Ascent was revealed in Mecca and thus discusses the fundamentals of faith. In this particular case, God describes the Day of Judgment. Many of these shorter chapters describe different aspect of the Day of Judgement and the Resurrection.

Particularly because the disbelievers of Mecca refused to accept as true that a Day of Judgment was possible, and they mocked Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, asking him to hasten the punishment if it was a real threat.

In the previous chapter, the terrifying upheaval that will take place in the universe on the Day of Judgement was described. This chapter aims more at the psychology of the Day; the human soul rather than the universe is the setting. Fear takes hold of the human soul and induces an inner panic.

Verses 1 – 18 The truth about the Hereafter

A questioner asks about the punishment of the Hereafter. He was one of many of the disbelievers that continuously challenged Prophet Muhammad to bring on the punishment he was trying to warn them about. The truth is that it will fall on the disbelievers and no one way to prevent it or delay it. It is inevitable because it is from God Himself, the Lord of the ways of ascent. This is an expression of God's loftiness. Throughout the Quran, He is mentioned as The Most High.



Having established the inevitability of the punishment, the chapter then describes the length of the Day of Judgment. We must remember that God does not measure time in the same way that we measure it. The duration of the Day of Judgment is equivalent to fifty thousand years of this world. All the angels and the Spirit will ascend to God on that Day. The majority of scholars agree that the Spirit refers to the angel Gabriel because he is mentioned in this way in other places of the Quran. It is an image that points to their ascent being very important and happening on a very significant Day.

Prophet Muhammad is told to be patient with their constant questioning and demands. They (the disbelievers) see the punishment and the Day of Judgment as being a long time away, but God on the other hand sees it as being something that will happen soon. If one day, according to God's judgment is fifty thousand years long, then the Day of Judgment is certainly quite near, almost upon us.

This is the Day when many celestial events will take place; some of them were mentioned in the previous chapter. The sky will be like molten metal and the mountains like tufts of wool. No person will ask about his friend even when they are within sight of one another. What is happening is so momentous that nothing else is worth thinking about it, all pales into insignificance.

To save themselves from the punishment the wicked will wish to ransom themselves by their children, their spouses, their siblings, their relatives, or even everyone on earth altogether. But no! There is nothing that can be a ransom. There is no escape. The punishment is the blazing fire. It will burn all those who turned away from the truth and hoarded wealth, not spending it the way of God.

Verses 19 – 35 Qualities of the righteous

Indeed humankind was created anxious. Whenever misfortune or evil touch him he is fretful, despondent and impatient. And when good fortune comes his way, he is tight-fisted and stingy, withholding his good fortune from everyone else. However, this is not the behavior of the righteous—those who are constant in their prayers. They give what is required of them in the form of obligatory charity to the beggars and the deprived. They also fear the Day of Judgment and the punishment knowing that no one is secure from it. They guard their chastity (or their private parts) from all except those who are lawful to them. They keep their trusts, honor their pledges and promises, give honest testimonies when required to do so, and carefully maintain their prayers. Those with these attributes will be honored in the gardens of Paradise.

Verses 36 – 44 The unbelievers' attitude

God asks, what is the matter with these disbelievers? They rush towards you (Prophet Muhammad) from the right and the left and even in crowds. They hurry to sit close enough to hear but far enough to mock and oppose your words. Do they seriously think they will enter Paradise before the believers? Do they all aspire to enter the Garden of

pleasure? No! They know they have been created from an insignificant sperm-drop and this should be enough for them to understand that God has complete authority over their affairs, and He has the power to resurrect them. How can they expect to enter Paradise except by the will of God?

God swears an oath by Himself that indeed He has the power to replace them with others better than them. Nothing is able to prevent Him from doing this. Leave them (Prophet Muhammad) to wallow in their vain talk and blunder about until they face the promised Day. That Day they will rush out of their graves as if they are rushing towards some goal with their eyes downcast and bodies humbled and ashamed.

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