

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ALLĀH IS NOT UNAWARE OF WHAT THE OPPRESSORS DO

A tafsīr of the closing verses of Sūrat Ibrāhīm (āyāt 42–52)

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A WORD ON THE SŪRA

Sūrat Ibrāhīm is a Makkan sūra, revealed in the years when the small community of believers had no worldly power, and the Quraysh had every appearance of it. It takes its name from the beloved of Allāh, Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, whose du‘ā’ for the valley of Makkah and its people stands at its heart, and it turns again and again upon a single contrast, that the word of truth is like a good tree, firmly rooted, its branches in the sky, whilst the word of falsehood is like a bad tree, torn up from the earth, having no stability. The verses before us, from āyah 42 to the end, are the closing movement of the sūra, and they answer the question that presses upon every believer who has ever watched the oppressor flourish, namely, where is Allāh in all of this? The answer given is neither that Allāh is absent, nor that His punishment is instant, but something more sobering than either, that He sees everything, that He records everything, and that He defers everything to a Day whose terror these verses then describe. It is my hope, that the ordinary worshipper amongst us finds in these āyāt what the first believers found in them, comfort for the oppressed, warning for the oppressor, and certainty that nothing is unseen.

I should say plainly, that these reflections were prepared and delivered in the shadow of the genocide in Gaza, as our brothers and sisters were being starved, bombed and buried before the eyes of the world, and the world’s powers looked on, or worse. In such days a question creeps into the hearts of even good people, and it is the very question this passage was revealed to answer: has Allāh not seen, and can He not punish? These āyāt were sent down so that the believers do not lose hope, and do not doubt for a moment Allāh’s ability to destroy those committing genocide and to seize them with a seizure that is painful and severe. Readers who come to these pages in a later time will meet them in a different moment, but the principle does not age, for the oppressor changes his flag and his slogan, and the promise of Allāh changes not at all.

INTRODUCTION

Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ Uthmānī رحمه الله explains, that in this last section of Sūrat Ibrāhīm the same people of Makkah are exhorted to take a lesson from what happened to the peoples of the past, and warned, in a nutshell, that should they still not return to their senses, they had better be ready to face the horrendous punishment of the day of Qiyāmah.¹

He observes, that the first verse of the passage is initially to comfort the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the oppressed of the world, and only then does it release the threat of a severe punishment upon all oppressors. The unjust practitioners of crime should not become carefree because Allāh Ta‘ālā has given them respite, nor deluded by the idea that Allāh is unaware of their wrongdoings, as though their flourishing despite their crimes, and the absence of any visiting punishment, were proof of His inattention. It is not so. Everything they are doing lies within the sight of Allāh Ta‘ālā, but He, in His mercy and wisdom, is giving them respite.

ĀYAH 42

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ اللَّهَ غَافِلًا عَمَّا يَعْمَلُ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنَّمَا يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ لِيَوْمٍ تَشْخَصُ فِيهِ الْأَبْصَارُ﴾

And presume not that Allāh is unaware of what the oppressors do, but He gives them respite up to a Day when the eyes will stare in horror.

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا

And your Lord is never forgetful.²

Sayyidunā Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī رضي الله عنه reported, that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, *إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَيُمْلِي لِلظَّالِمِ حَتَّى إِذَا أَخَذَهُ لَمْ يَفْلِتْهُ* — “Verily, Allāh gives respite to the wrongdoer until He seizes him, and he cannot escape.” Then the Prophet ﷺ recited the verse, “Such is the seizure of your Lord when He seizes the towns while they are doing wrong. Indeed, His seizure is painful and severe.”³

Allāh keeps a full record of what they do, to show them in the Hereafter. A ghāfil person is one who loses attention and becomes preoccupied, and Allāh is pure of all of that, as we recite in Āyat al-Kursī, that neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. And just as Allāh is aware of the oppressors, He is also fully aware of the oppressed. Indeed He does more than see them, for He answers them: when the Prophet ﷺ sent Mu‘ādh رضي الله عنه to Yemen, he told him, “Beware the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between it and Allāh.”⁴

We take great hope in the story of a young child who was terrorised, taken from his parents, left to die, then sold into slavery. He was accused of crimes he did not commit and spent years in a prison before being finally released, to become the treasurer of the land. Throughout his story, Allāh comforted Yūsuf عليه السلام by reminding him that Allāh was aware, and in full control, of the events that befell him, **وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَى أَمْرِهِ** — *and Allāh has full power over His affair*.⁵

For the ordinary worshipper amongst us, this āyah is a hand upon the shoulder. When the news leaves us feeling that cruelty answers to no one, we should remember, that the very first thing Allāh says about the oppressors is not addressed to them at all, but to us: do not presume. Do not presume that the ledger has been closed, or that the silence of the heavens is the absence of the Judge. The delay is not neglect, it is a date being set. Let this settle the heart in ṣalāh, and let it loosen the tongue in du‘ā’ for the oppressed, for their supplication, and ours on their behalf, rises with no barrier before it.

The Condition of the Early Muslims

Sayyidunā Bilāl رضي الله عنه. Abū Jahl started to torture the slaves in the community. Bilāl was an African slave owned by Umayyah ibn Khalaf, who was a close friend of Abū Jahl. Abū Jahl asked permission to deal with Bilāl over his acceptance of Islam, which was granted. Abū Jahl would whip Bilāl all night until he himself would become exhausted. When the heat would reach its peak, he would lay Bilāl down upon the scorching sand and place a rock on top of him to pin him down. Bilāl would be tied to horses and made to run. Yet his faith would not be shaken: he became known by his cry of *Aḥad, Aḥad*, One God, One God. Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه bought Bilāl for an inflated price and set him free, and Bilāl was made the muezzin of the Prophet ﷺ.

Sayyidunā Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt رضي الله عنه. Khabbāb was kidnapped as a young boy and sold into slavery. He accepted Islam in its early days, and the Quraysh experimented with torture upon him. He gained his freedom and joined the Prophet ﷺ, and he remained an inspirational figure: ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه would sit with him, and when he felt overwhelmed he would ask to see Khabbāb’s back and the scars of his torture. ‘Umar took an oath and said he had never seen anything like it in his life.

Sayyidunā ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir رضي الله عنه. ‘Ammār was the son of Yāsir and Sumayyah. He accepted Islam and would sneak out at night to sit and worship with the Prophet ﷺ. His parents were worried about the consequences of this, but after hearing about Islam they both accepted it. Abū Jahl found out, and he inflicted torture upon the family. He tied them up and would leave them there for days. The Prophet ﷺ would walk by in tears saying, “*Patience, O*

family of Yāsir! Glad tidings, for you will be reunited in Paradise.” Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه offered to purchase them, but this was declined. Sumayyah shouted at Abū Jahl that no matter what he did, they would never renounce their Islam. Abū Jahl became infuriated and killed her with a spear in front of her husband and son; she became the first martyr in Islam. Yāsir was beside himself, and Abū Jahl kicked him to death.

‘Ammār watched both his parents being murdered, and the Quraysh intensified his torture. Eventually he conceded to their demands, saying that he believed in al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā and that he did not believe in Muḥammad ﷺ. They cut him loose and walked off. ‘Ammār crawled to the Prophet ﷺ, crying that he had agreed to say what they wanted to hear. The Prophet ﷺ asked what was in his heart, and ‘Ammār explained that he had never believed in Allāh and His Messenger more, but that he had been overwhelmed. Allāh then revealed the āyah supporting ‘Ammār in his situation, reassuring him that īmān is not invalidated under torture so long as it remains firm in the heart, and the Companions were permitted to say whatever the torturers wanted to hear, so that they could escape.⁶

These were not stories the first hearers of Sūrat Ibrāhīm needed to be told, for they were living them. When the āyah said that Allāh is not unaware of what the oppressors do, Bilāl heard it with the scars of the sand upon his back, and ‘Ammār heard it as an orphan of both parents. That they held firm, and that Islam now reaches us across fourteen centuries because they held firm, is itself the proof of the promise these verses make.

Allāh Gives Them Respite — Why?

Allāh is not asked about His actions:

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ

*He cannot be questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned.*⁷

Yet He has, in His kindness, allowed us to see something of the wisdom. Allāh is al-Ḥalīm, the Forbearing: He allows them a chance for tawbah, until an appointed time.

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَفُورُ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ ۖ لَوْ يُؤَاخِذُهُمْ بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَعَجَّلَ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابَ

*And your Lord is the All-Forgiving, Full of Mercy. Were He to seize them for what they have earned, He would have hastened their punishment.*⁸

Allāh allows their crimes to accumulate, so as to increase their punishment:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُمَلِّئُهُمْ خَيْرًا لَّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّئُهُمْ لِيُزِدَادُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ

*And let not the disbelievers think that the respite We give them is good for them. We only give them respite so that they may increase in sin, and for them is a humiliating punishment.*⁹

And Allāh makes the oppressed endure more, to raise their ranks further.¹⁰ It is related, that one of the people in the time of Ḥajjāj, known as the butcher, saw an individual wrongly hanged to death. He said, “My Rabb, Your tolerance of these oppressors is detrimental to the oppressed.” He slept and saw a dream: Qiyāmah had taken place, and that same hanged man was in the highest levels of Jannah. Then he heard someone say, “Indeed, My tolerance of the oppressor was the reason why this person earned this exclusive place.”¹¹

And as a matter of principle, imagine if Allāh punished us immediately for our own crimes?

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِظُلْمِهِمْ مَا تَرَكَ عَلَيْهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ

*Were Allāh to take mankind to task for their wrongdoing, He would not leave a single creature upon the earth.*¹²

Here the ordinary worshipper should pause, for the respite that maddens us when we see it granted to tyrants is the very respite by which we ourselves are still standing. Every day that our own sins go unpunished is a day of ḥilm extended to us, and the correct response to it is not complacency but tawbah, before the appointed time arrives.

Tests are a Part of Life

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَن تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُم مَّثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ

*Do you think that you will enter Paradise while you have not yet been visited by circumstances like those that were faced by the people who passed away before you? They were afflicted by hardship and suffering, and were so shaken that the messenger, and those who believed with him, said, “When will the help of Allāh come?” Behold, the help of Allāh is near.*¹³

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ ۚ أَيْحَسِبُ أَنْ لَنْ يَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ

*Indeed, We have created humankind in constant struggle. Does he think that no one has power over him?*¹⁴

Struggle, then, is not a sign that Allāh has abandoned His servants, but the very fabric upon which their ranks are woven. The question the believer asks in hardship is not “why me,” but “what is being asked of me,” and the answer of the Qur’ān is always the same, ṣabr, and the certainty that the help of Allāh is near.

ĀYAH 43

﴿مُطْعِنِينَ مُقْنِعِينَ رُءُوسِهِمْ لَا يَرْتَدُّ إِلَيْهِمْ طَرْفُهُمْ وَأَفْئِدَتُهُمْ هَوَاءٌ﴾

Hastening forward, with necks outstretched and heads facing upwards, their gaze not returning towards them, and their hearts empty.

Muftī Shafīʿ رحمه الله explains, that the postponement of sudden punishment against these unjust people is not any better for them, because ultimately they will be seized in the great punishment of the Ākhirah, which will overtake them all of a sudden, and the details of that punishment, and the horrendous happenings to be experienced there, keep appearing right up to the end of the sūra.¹⁵

Consider the picture the āyah paints, word by word. *Ṭarfuhum* is their gaze: their eyes are staring in confusion, trying not to blink, because of the horror and the tremendous sights they are witnessing, and for fear of what is about to strike them, and we seek refuge with Allāh from such an end. This is why Allāh then says, “and their hearts empty.” The cavity where the heart sits will feel vacated, just as we say “my heart sank” when regret and sorrow overwhelm us, and when terror takes hold the opposite applies, and the heart travels upwards, to the throat. A body hastening forward, a gaze that cannot return, a chest that is hollow: it is the anatomy of a person from whom all pretence has been stripped.

The lesson for us, is that the same heart which will be empty on that Day for the heedless can be filled in this life, with dhikr, with the Qur'ān, and with love of the One before whom we will stand. Whoever fills his heart now will not find it hollow then, by the mercy of Allāh.

ĀYAH 44

﴿وَأَنْذِرِ النَّاسَ يَوْمَ يَأْتِيهِمُ الْعَذَابُ فَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا رَبَّنَا
أَخِّرْنَا إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ نَّجِبْ دَعْوَتَكَ وَتَتَّبِعِ الرُّسُلَ أَوَلَمْ
تَكُونُوا أَقْسَمْتُمْ مِّنْ قَبْلُ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ زَوَالٍ﴾

Warn the people of a day when punishment will come upon them, and the wrongdoers will say, "Our Lord, give us respite for a short term, and we will respond to Your call and follow the messengers." (Allāh will say,) "Is it not that you had sworn oaths earlier that you would never have to leave?"

Notice the bitter symmetry: those who were given respite will beg for respite, and this time it will be refused. The Qur'ān returns often to the attitude of the criminals in the Hereafter, who will plead for delay and for a return, and the question hangs over every such plea, has Allāh not given them respite enough to alter their ways?

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الْمُجْرِمُونَ نَاكِسُو رُءُوسِهِمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ
صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

If only you could see the wicked hanging their heads before their Lord, crying, "Our Lord! We have now seen and heard, so send us back and we will do good. We truly have sure faith now."¹⁶

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ

Until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord! Send me back."¹⁷

وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِخُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ ۖ أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا
يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَن تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ فَذُوقُوا فَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِن نَّصِيرٍ

*Therein they will cry, "Our Lord, remove us; we will do righteousness, other than what we were doing!" But did We not grant you life enough for whoever would take heed to take heed, and the warner came to you? So taste the punishment, for the wrongdoers have no helper.*¹⁸

Seeking a Return to the World

قَالُوا رَبَّنَا غَلَبَتْ عَلَيْنَا شِقْوَتُنَا وَكُنَّا قَوْمًا ضَالِّينَ ۖ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْهَا فَإِنْ عُدْنَا فَإِنَّا
ظَالِمُونَ ۖ قَالَ اخْسِئُوا فِيهَا وَلَا تُكَلِّمُونِ ۖ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِي يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا
آمَنَّا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ۖ فَاتَّخَذْتُمُوهُمْ سَخِرِيًّا حَتَّىٰ أَنْسَوْكُم ذِكْرِي
وَكُنْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ تَضْحَكُونَ

They will cry, "Our Lord! Our ill-fate took hold of us, so we became a misguided people.

*Our Lord, get us out from here; if we do this again, then of course we will be transgressors." He will say, "Stay in it, humiliated, and do not speak to Me. There was indeed a group of My servants who used to say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so forgive us and have mercy upon us, and You are the best of all the merciful.' But you made fun of them, so much so that they caused you to forget My remembrance, and you used to laugh at them."*¹⁹

How chilling, that among the charges read against them is their mockery of the believers. The ones they laughed at in the dunyā, the ones whose du‘ā’ they ridiculed, become the evidence against them. Let no one amongst us ever make light of a believer for their worship, and let no believer be ashamed of it before those who scoff.

Decline and Downfall of Empires

Zawāl is to move from your peak, as in the time of *Zuhr*, when the sun declines from its zenith. In this āyah it is first a reference to losing power in this dunyā. Have they forgotten Allāh's power over the dunyā and its people?

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكُ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُدْلُّ
مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

*Say, "O Allāh! Lord of all authority! You give authority to whoever You please and remove it from whoever You please; You honour whoever You please and disgrace whoever You please. All good is in Your Hands. Surely You alone are Most Capable of everything."*²⁰

It is also a reference to the Hereafter, for death itself is a form of *zawāl*, and we are soon forgotten. Everything comes to an end. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ had a she-camel called al-‘Aḍbā’ which could not be beaten. One day a Bedouin came on a riding-camel and beat her in a race. The Muslims were upset by that, and when he saw the expressions on their faces, they said, “O Messenger of Allāh, al-‘Aḍbā’ has been beaten.” He said, “*It is a right upon Allāh that nothing is raised in this world except that He lowers it.*”²¹

They took oaths in the *dunyā* to support their oppression, extremely arrogant, and Allāh will recall these oaths in the Hereafter. They may not have said these words out loud, but their attitudes suggested that this is what they believed.

They can torture and oppress, but it is not Allāh's system to let someone reign in terror forever. Allāh says, *وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نَدَاوُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ — We deal out such days among people in turn.*²² Every dog has its day.

The people of the past would gloat and boast about their power, so Allāh reminds them of His own strength and power. Do they even compare? Whoever doubts it should walk through the ruins the Qurʾān points to, and ask where the boasters have gone.

ĀYAH 45

﴿وَسَكَنْتُمْ فِي مَسَاكِنِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ
كَيْفَ فَعَلْنَا بِهِمْ وَضَرَبْنَا لَكُمْ الْأَمْثَالَ﴾

And you dwelt in the dwellings of those who wronged themselves, and it became clear to you how We dealt with them, and We put forth for you the examples.

The audience for this āyah is primarily the mushriks of Makkah, who passed the ruins of ‘Ād and Thamūd on their trading journeys. Allāh always gives us a precedent to work with. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله comments, you have witnessed, or heard of, the news of what happened to the earlier disbelieving nations, but you did not draw a lesson from their end, nor did what We punished them with provide an example for you.²³

The irony of the Zionist oppression is that they were themselves driven out of Egypt towards Palestine, fleeing Fir‘awn. They have seen this story before, when they were the oppressed. To wish the same upon another people is strange, and soulless.

Consider how Sayyidunā Mūsā عليه السلام changed the narrative with Fir‘awn. Fir‘awn said, *وَفَعَلْتَ فَعَلْتِكَ الَّتِي فَعَلْتَ وَأَنْتَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ* — that is, you killed a Copt, and you are an ingrate. Imagine the irony. Mūsā عليه السلام responded, *قَالَ فَعَلْتُهَا إِذَا وَأَنَا مِنَ الضَّالِّينَ* — *I did it when I was astray, I made a mistake*. Then Mūsā عليه السلام went on the attack and said that it was no excuse for Fir‘awn to enslave the Banū Isrā’īl: let us talk about your horrific crime.²⁴

There is a discipline here for anyone who speaks for the oppressed: own your faults honestly and briefly, then refuse to let the oppressor’s accusation bury the far greater crime. Mūsā عليه السلام did not lose the argument by admitting his mistake, he won it, because truthfulness disarmed the distraction.

ĀYAH 46

﴿وَقَدْ مَكَرُوا مَكْرَهُمْ وَعِنْدَ اللَّهِ مَكْرُهُمْ وَإِنْ كَانَ مَكْرُهُمْ
لِتَرْوُلَ مِنْهُ الْجِبَالُ﴾

And they would plot, and whatever they plot is before Allāh, even though their plot is such as would move the mountains.

There is a comparison here between their might and Allāh’s might: the One who made the mountains, which you can neither scale nor destroy — do you think you can challenge Him?

We hide when we plot. Allāh reminds them: they can hide it from the people, they can lie about the reality of the situation — weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the bombing of hospitals in Gaza — but Allāh knows their secrets, and He will expose them.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَا أَدْنَى مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْثَرُ إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا

*Do you not see that Allāh knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth? If three converse privately, He is their fourth. If five, He is their sixth. Whether fewer or more, He is with them wherever they may be.*²⁵

Wa in kāna makruhūm: the words carry the senses of “even if,” or “indeed,” or “their plot cannot” move the mountains — each reading a warning in itself. And against their scheming stands the plan of Allāh:

إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا ۖ فَمَهْلُ الْكَافِرِينَ أَمَهُمْ رُويًا

*They are devising a scheme, and I am devising a plan. So bear with the disbelievers; let them be for a little while.*²⁶

The believer who feels small before the machinery of powerful states should read this āyah slowly. The plots are real, and the Qurʾān does not pretend otherwise; it simply reminds us where they sit — *inda ʾllāh*, before Allāh, on His desk, so to speak, fully documented, awaiting His verdict.

ĀYAH 47

﴿ فَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ اللَّهَ مُخْلَفَ وَعْدِهِ رُسُلَهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انتِقَامٍ ﴾

So never think that Allāh will go against His promise to His messengers. Surely Allāh is Mighty, the Lord of Retribution.

They break their promises to us: “Never again!” — but they lie. Srebrenica, July 1995; Israel, today. Allāh does not break His promise. His first promise is conditional to the Prophet ﷺ himself:

فَإِمَّا نَذْهَبَنَّ بِكَ فَإِنَّا مِنْهُمْ مُنْتَقِمُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾ أَوْ نُرِيَنَّكَ الَّذِي وَعَدْنَاهُمْ فَإِنَّا عَلَيْهِمْ مُقْتَدِرُونَ
﴿٦١﴾ فَاسْتَمْسِكْ بِالَّذِي أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ إِنَّكَ عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

Even if We take you away, We will surely inflict punishment upon them; or We shall let you witness the punishment We threatened them with, for We have full power over them.

*So hold fast to what has been revealed to you: you are truly on the right path.*²⁷

ج
كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَا غَلِبَ إِلَّا أَنَا وَرُسُلِي إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

*Allāh has decreed, “I and My messengers will certainly prevail.” Surely Allāh is All-Powerful, Almighty.*²⁸

إِنَّا لَنَنْصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْأَشْهَادُ ﴿٦٢﴾ يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ
الظَّالِمِينَ مَعَذِرَتُهُمْ وَلَهُمُ اللَّعْنَةُ وَلَهُمْ سُوءُ الدَّارِ

*We certainly help Our messengers and the believers, both in this worldly life and on the Day the witnesses will stand forth. On that Day the excuses of the evildoers will not profit them; theirs will be rejection, and theirs the worst of homes.*²⁹

And in the ḥadīth qudsī, Allāh says to this ummah what He said to those before it, that His help may come after a time, but it comes.³⁰ The believer's task is not to set the timetable, but to be found, when the promise is fulfilled, amongst those who never doubted it.

ĀYAH 48

﴿يَوْمَ تَبْدُلُ الْأَرْضُ غَيْرَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ^ص وَبَرَزُوا لِلَّهِ
الْوَّاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ﴾

The day on which this earth will be changed into some other earth, and the skies as well, and they shall all appear before Allāh, the One, the All-Dominant.

The world will be very different to how we know it. Sayyidah ‘Āishah رضي الله عنها said, I asked the Prophet ﷺ, where will the people be on the day the earth is changed into another earth? He said, عَلَى الصِّرَاطِ — “Upon the *Ṣirāṭ*.”³¹

The Prophet ﷺ also said, “On the Day of Resurrection, the people will be gathered upon a white, flat earth, like a round wheat loaf, with no recognisable landmark for anyone.”³²

We will be standing in front of Allāh on that day, without a translator, with everything exposed. No borders, no embassies, no veto at any council, and no landmark to hide behind. On an earth with no features, the only distinction left will be deeds.

ĀYAH 49

﴿وَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّقْرَّنِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ﴾

On that Day you will see the wicked bound together in chains.

They will become the means of each other's punishment. They were allies in the dunyā, so they will be allies here too, with no place to go, and nowhere to escape.

وَإِذَا أُلْقُوا مِنْهَا مَكَانًا ضَيِّقًا مُّقْرَّنِينَ دَعَوْا هُنَالِكَ ثُبُورًا

*And when they are thrown into a narrow place therein, chained together, they will cry out there for destruction.*³³

Only righteous companionship survives that Day, as Allāh says, *الْأَخْلَاءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ* — *Close friends on that Day will be enemies to one another, except the God-conscious.*³⁴ So let each of us look at whose company we keep, and whose causes we chain ourselves to, for the alliances of this world are carried into the next.

ĀYAH 50

﴿سَرَّابِلُهُمْ مِّنْ قَطِرَانٍ وَتَغْشَىٰ وُجُوهَهُمُ النَّارُ﴾

With garments of tar, and their faces covered with flames.

Tar is one of the fastest things to catch fire, and it creates a thick smoke.

﴿تَلْفَحُ وُجُوهَهُمُ النَّارُ وَهُمْ فِيهَا كَالْحُوتِ﴾

*The Fire will burn their faces, leaving them deformed.*³⁵

ĀYAH 51

﴿لِيَجْزِيَ اللَّهُ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ
الْحِسَابِ﴾

As such, Allāh will reward every soul for what it has committed. Surely Allāh is swift in reckoning.

Unlike our enemies, Allāh will not be unjust, and no person will carry another person's burden. This is the quiet consolation folded inside the warning: the same precision that condemns the oppressor guarantees the oppressed that not an atom of their suffering has been miscounted, and not an atom of their patience will go unrewarded.

ĀYAH 52

﴿ هَذَا بَلَاغٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا بِهِ وَلِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ
وَلِيَذْكُرُوا الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴾

This Qur'ān is a sufficient message for humanity, so that they may take it as a warning, and know that there is only One God, and so that people of reason may be mindful.

This Qur'ān is a message, a tablīgh, and these stories are a reminder for us. The sūra that opened with a Book revealed to bring mankind out of darkness into light closes by telling us that the message has now been delivered, and what remains is our response to it.

May Allāh make us amongst those who take heed, may He fill our hearts before the Day when hearts are emptied, may He hasten relief for the oppressed wherever they are, and may He deal with the oppressors as He has promised. This small effort of mine is offered in the hope that abler hands than mine will take these āyāt further. May Allāh accept it. Āmīn.



NOTES

1. Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ ʿUthmānī, *Maʿārif al-Qurʾān*, commentary on Sūrat Ibrāhīm 14:42.
2. Sūrat Maryam 19:64.
3. Bukhārī 4686 and Muslim 2583. The verse recited is Sūrat Hūd 11:102.
4. Bukhārī 2448 and Muslim 19, from the instruction given to Muʿadh ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه upon his despatch to Yemen.
5. Sūrat Yūsuf 12:21.
6. The āyah is Sūrat al-Naḥl 16:106, “*except one who is compelled, whilst his heart is at rest with īmān.*” The account of ʿAmmār رضي الله عنه is related in the tafsīr of this verse and in the sīra literature.
7. Sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ 21:23.
8. Sūrat al-Kahf 18:58.
9. Sūrat Āl ʿImrān 3:178.
10. As indicated in the ḥadīth of Musnad Aḥmad, that when a rank is written for a servant which his deeds do not reach, Allāh tries him in his body, his wealth or his children, until he reaches the rank written for him.
11. Related as an illustrative account in the tafsīr and *zuhd* literature concerning the wisdom of respite; it is cited here for its meaning, not as a ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ.
12. Sūrat al-Naḥl 16:61.
13. Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:214.
14. Sūrat al-Balad 90:4–5.
15. *Maʿārif al-Qurʾān*, commentary on Sūrat Ibrāhīm 14:43.
16. Sūrat al-Sajdah 32:12.
17. Sūrat al-Muʾminūn 23:99.
18. Sūrat Faṭīr 35:37.
19. Sūrat al-Muʾminūn 23:106–110.
20. Sūrat Āl ʿImrān 3:26.
21. Bukhārī 2872; also Nasāʾī 3588. If even the camel of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ was not spared the law of zawāl, what empire imagines itself exempt?
22. Sūrat Āl ʿImrān 3:140.
23. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Aẓīm*, on Sūrat Ibrāhīm 14:45. The same theme recurs in Sūrat Muḥammad 47:13, “*How many a town We destroyed, mightier in strength than your town which drove you out.*”
24. Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ 26:19–22.
25. Sūrat al-Mujādilah 58:7.

26. Sūrat al-Ṭāriq 86:15–17.
27. Sūrat al-Zukhruf 43:41–43.
28. Sūrat al-Mujādilah 58:21.
29. Sūrat Ghāfir 40:51–52.
30. Alluding to the ḥadīth in Tirmidhī in which Allāh responds to the one who calls upon Him, *“I shall surely help you, even if after a time.”*
31. Muslim 315.
32. Bukhārī 6521 and Muslim 2790.
33. Sūrat al-Furqān 25:13.
34. Sūrat al-Zukhruf 43:67.
35. Sūrat al-Mu’minūn 23:104.