



سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ لِلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ



*A questioner asked about a Penalty to befall -- The Unbelievers the  
which there is none to ward off --*

## Quran English Translation & Commentary

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### Introduction and Summary

This is another eschatological Surah closely connected in subject matter with the last one. Patience and the mystery of Time will show the ways that climb the Heaven. Sin and Goodness must each eventually come to its own.

Chronologically it belongs to the late early middle Makkan period, possibly soon after Surah 49.

## C.250 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Man can ascend to the Presence of Allah,  
But by gradual Ways and in process of Time.  
But what is the Time? A day is as fifty  
Thousand years, on two different planes.  
What seems near is far, and what seems far is near.  
So will be Judgement, when things as we know them  
Will be transformed completely in a world  
All new. Evil will come to its own,  
Whatever its masks in this transitory world,  
And good will surely reach its goal.  
The good life is patient, in prayer  
And well-doing. Faith and the earnest search  
For the Good Pleasure of All, purity and probity.  
These are the paths to the Heights and Gardens  
Of Bliss. No evil can enter there:  
For the evil are other ways, leading  
By steep descent to dark Ignominy!*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ ...

1. A questioner asked...

**C5675.** Any one might ask. When will Judgment come?

That question usually implies doubt. The answer is: the knowledge of Time is beyond man's comprehension. But there is something which touches him closely and concerns his conduct and his future welfare; and that is explained in four propositions.

- Judgment is sure to come, and none can ward it off;
- it will exact a dreadful Penalty from Unbelievers, but the righteous have nothing to fear;
- it will be a Penalty from Allah, the Lord of both Justice and Mercy; it will not be merely a blind calamity of fate; and
- further we are reminded of another title of Allah, "Lord of the Ways of Ascent"; which means that though He sits high on His Throne of Glory, He is not inaccessible, but in His infinite Mercy has provided ways of ascent to Him;

see next note.

... بَعْدَابٍ وَأَقْعٍ (١)

.. about a Penalty to befall --

لِّلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ (٢)

2. The Unbelievers the which there is none to ward off --

مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ (٣)

3. (A Penalty) from Allah, Lord of the Ways of Ascent.

**C5676. Maarij.** stair-ways, ways of ascent.

In 43:33, the word is used in its literal sense: "silver stair-ways on which to go up".

Here there is a profound spiritual meaning. Can we reach up to Allah Most High? In His infinite grace He gives that privilege to angels. But the way is not easy, nor can it be travelled in a day.

See the next two notes.

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ ...

4. The angels and the Spirit ...

**C5677. Ruh:** "The Spirit".

Cf. 78:38, "the Spirit and the angels"; and 97:4, "the angels and the Spirit".

In 16:2, we have translated **Ruh** by "**inspiration**". Some Commentators understand the angel Gabriel by "the Spirit". But I think a more general meaning is possible, and fits the context better. (R).

... إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ ...

... ascend unto Him in a Day ...

**C5678.** Cf. 32:4-5, and notes 3632 and 3634.

... كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ (٤)

... the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years:

فَأَصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا (٥)

5. Therefore do thou hold Patience -- a Patience of beautiful (contentment).

**C5679.** The prophet of Allah, persecuted and in trouble with the world, should yet hold Patience-not the sort of patience which goes with complaints expressed or suppressed, but the sort of patience that is content with the ordering of Allah's world, for he believes and knows it to be good, as did the holy Prophet Muhammad. Such a patience is akin to Good pleasure, for it arises from the purest faith and trust in Allah. (R).

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا (٦)

6. They see the (Day) indeed as a far-off (event):

وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا (٧)

7. But We see it (quite) near.

**C5680.** The men of evil may see the just retribution for their sins so far off that they doubt whether it would ever come. But in Allah's sight, and on the scale of the Universal Plan, it is quite near; for time as we know it hardly exists in the next world. It may come even in this life: but it is bound to come eventually.

يَوْمَ تَكُونُ السَّمَاءُ كَالْمُهْلِ (٨)

8. The Day that the sky will be like molten brass,

**C5681.** Cf. 18:29, where the wrong-doer will have a drink like melted brass in Hell;

and 44:45, where his food will be like molten brass.

Here the appearance of the sky is compared to molten brass, or, as some understand it, like the dregs of oil. What is conveyed by the metaphor is that the beautiful blue sky will melt away.

وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ (٩)

9. And the mountains will be like wool,

**C5682.** Cf. 101:5, where the metaphor of carded wool is used.

The mountains which seem so solid will be like flakes of wool driven by the carder's hand.

وَلَا يَسْأَلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا (١٠)

10. And no friend will ask after a friend,

**C5683.** The world as we know it will have so completely passed away that the landmarks in the heavens and on earth will also have vanished.

Not only that, but the human relationships of mind and heart will have been transformed by sin into something ugly and dreadful. The sinners will be so overcome with terror at the realisation of their personal responsibility that they will desert their most intimate friends, and indeed their very sight of each other will add to their agony.

يُبْصِرُونَ... ..

11. Though they will be put in sight of each other --

... يَوَدُّ الْمُجْرِمُ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيهِ (١١)

the sinner's desire will be:

would that he could redeem himself from the **Penalty of that Day** by (sacrificing) his children,

**C5684.** The sinner will offer his children, his family, his kinsmen, who had sheltered and protected him,-in fact everything on earth that he could-as a ransom for himself. Such would be his selfishness and his agony.

وَصَاحِبَيْهِ وَأَخِيهِ (١٢)

12. His wife and his brother,

وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ (١٣)

13. His kindred who sheltered him.

وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ (١٤)

14. And all,

all that is on earth -- so it could deliver him:

**C5685.** What would not the sinner give for his own deliverance! But nothing could save him. The Fire of Hell would be roaring for him!

كَلَّا إِنَّهَا لَأُطَى (١٥)

15. By no means!

For it would be the Fire of Hell! --

نَزَّاعَةً لِّلشَّوَى (١٦)

16. Plucking out (his being) right to the skull! --

**C5686.** It would be a Fire not only burning his body, but reaching right up to his brains and his understanding and -as is said in 104:7- his heart and affections also.

In other words the Fire will burn into his inmost being.

تَدْعُو مَنْ أَدْبَرَ وَتَوَلَّى (١٧)

17. Inviting (all) such as turn their backs and turn away their faces (from the Right),

**C5687.** The analysis of sin is given in four master-strokes, of which the first two refer to the will or psychology of the sinner, and the last two to the use he makes of the good things of this life.

1. Sin begins with turning your back to the Right, refusing to face it squarely, running away from it whether from cowardice or indifference.
2. But Conscience and the sense of Right will try to prevent the flight; the Grace of Allah will meet the sinner at all comers and try to reclaim him; the hardened sinner will deliberately turn away his face from it, insult it, and reject it.
3. The result of this psychology will be that he will abandon himself to greed, to the correction of riches, and the acquisition of material advantages to which he is not entitled; this may involve hypocrisy, fraud, and crime.
4. Having acquired the material advantages, the next step will be to keep others out of them, to prevent hoarded wealth from fructifying by circulation, to conceal it from envy or spite. This is the spiritual Rake's Progress.

وَجَمَعَ فَأَوْعَى (١٨)

18. And collect (wealth) and hide it (from use)!

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا (١٩)

19. Truly man was created very impatient --

**C5688.** Man, according to the Plan of Allah, was to be in the best of moulds (95:4). But in order to fulfil his high destiny he was given free-will to a limited extent. The wrong use of this free-will makes his nature weak (4:28), or hasty (17:11), or impatient, as here.

That becomes his nature by his own act, but he is spoken of as so created because of the capacities given to him in his creation.

إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا (٢٠)

20. Fretful when evil touches him;

وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا (٢١)

21. And niggardly when good reaches him --

**C5689.** In adversity he complains and gets into despair. In prosperity he becomes arrogant and forgets other people's rights and his own shortcomings.

Cf. 41:49-50.

إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ (٢٢)

22. Not so those devoted to Prayer --

**C5690.** The description of those **devoted to Prayer** is given in a number of clauses that follow, introduced by the words "Those who ....."

**"Devoted to Prayer"** is here but another aspect of what is described elsewhere as the Faithful and the Righteous.

Devotion to prayer does not mean merely a certain number of formal rites or prostrations. It means a complete surrender of one's being to Allah. This means;

- an earnest approach to and realisation of Allah's Presence ("steadfastness in Prayer");
- acts of practical and real charity;
- and attempt to read this life in terms of the Hereafter;
- the seeking of the Peace of Allah and avoidance of His displeasure;
- chastity;
- probity true and firm witness; and
- guarding the prayer. (verse 34).



الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ (٢٣)

23. Those who remain steadfast to their prayer;

وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْلُومٌ (٢٤)

24. And those in whose wealth is a recognized right

لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ (٢٥)

25. For the (needy) who asks and him who is prevented (for some reason from asking);

**C5691.** See n. 5001 to 51:19.

True charity consists in finding out those in real need, whether they ask or not. Most frequently those who ask are idle men who insolently wish to live upon others. But all cases of those who ask should be duly investigated, in case a little timely help may set the erring on the way. But the man with wealth or talent or opportunity has the further responsibility of searching out those in need of his assistance, in order to show that he holds all gifts in trust for the service of his fellow- creatures.

وَالَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ (٢٦)

26. And those who hold to the truth of the Day of Judgment;

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مِّنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّهِمْ مُّشْفِقُونَ (٢٧)

27. And those **who fear** the displeasure of their Lord --

**C5692.** A true fear of Allah is the fear of offending against His holy Will and Law, and is therefore akin to the love of Allah. It proceeds from the realisation that all true peace and tranquility comes from attuning our will to the universal Will and that sin causes discord, disharmony, and displeasure,-another name for the Wrath of Allah.

إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّهِمْ غَيْرُ مَأْمُونٍ (٢٨)

28. For their Lord's displeasure is the opposite of Peace and Tranquility --

**C5693.** Some would construe this verse:

"And their Lord's displeasure is one against which there is no security";

meaning that the punishment of sin may come suddenly at any time, when you least expect it.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرْوَجُهُمْ حَافِظُونَ (٢٩)

29. And those who guard their chastity,

إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ (٣٠)

30. Except with their wives and the (captives) whom their right hands possess -- for (then) they are not to be blamed,

**C5694.** Captives of war may be married as such: see 4:25:

but their status is inferior to that of free wives they are free. This institution of the captives of war is now obsolete.

Such inferiority of status as there was, was in the status of captivity, not in the status of marriage as such, in which there are no degrees except by local customs, which Islam does not recognize.

فَمَنْ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ (٣١)

31. But those who trespass beyond this are transgressors --

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ (٣٢)

32. And those who respect their trusts and covenants;

**C5695.** For obligations of trusts and covenants, express or implied, see n. 682 to 5:1.

They are just as sacred in ordinary everyday life as they are in special spiritual relationships. In addition, our life itself, and such reason and talents as we possess, as well as our wealth and possessions are trusts, of which we must fulfil the duties punctiliously.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِشَهَادَاتِهِمْ قَائِمُونَ (٣٣)

33. And those who stand firm in their testimonies;

**C5696.** If we know any truth of any kind, to that we must bear witness, as affecting the lives or interests of our fellow-beings,-firmly, not half-heartedly, without fear or favour, even if it causes loss or trouble to us, or if it loses us friends or associates.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ (٣٤)

34. And those who guard (the sacredness) of their worship --

**C5697.** Worship or prayer includes honest work, and every good deed. To guard the sacredness of this ideal is to sum up the whole duty of man.

We began with "steadfastness in prayer" in [verse 23](#) above, and after a review of various aspects of the good man's life, close with the guarding of worship, ie, living as in the sight of Allah.

أُولَٰئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُّكْرَمُونَ (٣٥)

35. Such will be the honored ones in the Gardens of (Bliss).

## Section 2

فَمَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قِبَلَكَ مُهْطِعِينَ (٣٦)

36. Now what is the matter with the Unbelievers that they rush madly **before thee** --

**C5698. Before thee.** The Unbelievers did not believe in a Hereafter. When the Bliss of the Hereafter was described, as in the last verse, they ridiculed it and pretended to be running in for it as in a race. They are here rebuked in the same tone of sarcasm.

عَنِ الِّيمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ عَزِيْنَ (٣٧)

37. From the right and from the left, in crowds?

أَيُّطَمَعُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ أَنْ يُدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيمٍ (٣٨)

38. Does every man of them long to enter the Garden of Bliss?

كُلَّا إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِّمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٩)

39. By no means!

For We have created them out of the (base matter) they know!

**C5699.** The animal part of man is nothing to be proud of, and they know it. It is by spiritual effort, and long preparation through a good life that a man can rise above the mere animal part of him to his high dignity as a spiritual being, and his noble destiny in the Hereafter.

فَلَا أَفْسِيْمٌ ...

40. Now I do call to witness...

**C5700.** For the form of adjuration, cf. 69:38, n. 5665; also 56:75.

Here the witness placed before us by Allah is His own power and glory manifested in the splendour of sunrise and sunset at different points through the solar year,

... رَبِّ الْمَشَارِقِ وَالْمَغَارِبِ ...

... the Lord of all points in the East and the West ...

**C5701.** See n. 4034 to 37:5.

If Allah has such power in the wonderful phenomena of the rising of the sun at varying points, repeated year after year, can you not see that He can easily substitute better men than you Unbelievers and blasphemers?

... إِنَّا لَقَادِرُونَ (٤٠)

... that We can certainly --

**C5702.** The transition from the singular "I" to the plural "We" may be noted. See n. 56 to 2:38.

... عَلَى أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ ...

41. Substitute for them better (men) than they;

... وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ (٤١)

and We are not to be defeated (in Our Plan).

فَدَّرْهُمْ يَخُوضُوا وَيَلْعَبُوا ...

42. So leave them to plunge in vain talk and play about, ...

... حَتَّىٰ يُلَاقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ (٤٢)

... until they encounter that Day of theirs which they have been promised! --

**C5703.** Their talk, their skepticism, is vain, because all spiritual evidence is against it; it is like the foolish play of people who do not think seriously. But the tremendous Day of Judgment and Reality will come, as described in the next two verses.

يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ نُصَبٍ يُوْفَضُونَ (٤٣)

43. The Day whereon they will issue from their sepulchers in sudden hast as if they were rushing to a goal-post (fixed for them) --

**C5704.** Now there will be a definite Goal-post or Banner or Standard of Truth fixed, which all must acknowledge. But they will acknowledge it in shame and dejection. For the time for their repentance and amendment will then have passed.

خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهُفُهُمْ ذَّلَّةٌ ...

44. Their eyes lowered in dejection -- ignominy covering them (all over)!

... ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ (٤٤)

Such is the Day the which they are promised!



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