

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(Change. From All Praises to Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

18th Taraweeh, Ramadan 1446 Hijri

Summary of Verses 34:1-37:182

(Sura Saba is a Makki Sura)

Sura Saba (Sheba) (Verses 34:1-54)

Allah is Omniscient. He is the Creator of the universe and all that is in it. He *"knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it. He knows all that comes down from heaven and all that ascends to it ..."* (34:1-2)

Beyond the physical world there is another world hidden from the human eye but Allah *"knows all that is hidden. Not an atom's weight in heaven or earth escapes Him, nor is there anything smaller or greater but is recorded in a clear record."* (34:3)

The parables of prophets Daud and Sulaiman (AS) show how mastery of useful knowledge and technology can also lead to humankind's spiritual growth if infused with gratitude toward Allah. *"On Daud We bestowed Our favor: 'O you Mountains, echo back the praises of Allah, and you birds too! And We made the iron soft for him.' And We said, 'Make coats of mail armor, and do what is right, I am watching over all that you do.'"* (34:10-11)

Likewise, for Sulaiman, Daud's son, *"We made the wind obedient to Sulaiman: its journey in the morning was (equal to the journey of) one month, and its journey in the afternoon was (equal to the journey) of another month, and We made a stream of molten brass flow for him, and there were jinns who worked in front of him ..."* (34:12)

Daud and Sulaiman were kings as well as prophets but their responsibilities and the demands on their time never prevented them from fulfilling their spiritual obligations.

The community of Sheba, on the other hand, denied Allah's favors: *"But they turned away from Allah. So We let loose upon them the waters of the dam and replaced their gardens with two others bearing bitter fruit, tamarisks and a few lote trees. Thus did We punish them for their ingratitude. Do we punish any but the ungrateful?"* (34:16-17)

Allah tests us by wealth and affluence as much as by poverty and hardship.

There is a scene in this Sura (as there are in several other Suras) from the Day of Judgment in which those who encouraged disbelief and those who supported them exchange bitter accusations: *"When the wrongdoers will be brought before their Lord, they will be throwing the blame on one another, and the powerless ones say to the arrogant ones: 'Had it not been for you, we would have been believers!' The arrogant ones will then say to the powerless ones: 'Did we keep you from Allah's guidance when it was presented to you? No! Surely you yourselves were wrongdoers!'"* (34:31-32)

We gain the proper perspective on riches, children, and good deeds in this verse: *"It is not your wealth nor your children that will bring you nearer to Us in degree but only those who believe and do good. They are the ones for whom there are manifold rewards for their deeds while they reside securely in dwellings high."* (34:37)

(Sura Fatir is a Makki Sura)

Sura Fatir (The Originator) (Verses 35:1-45)

Most of the Sura deals with Allah's unique power to create and resurrect His

creation. He revealed His will through His prophets but only those endowed with spiritual knowledge stand in awe of Allah. *"None can withhold the mercy that Allah bestows on people, and what He withholds, none can provide, apart from Him. He is the Almighty, the Wise One."* (35:2)

We are again reminded that *"nor can a bearer of burdens bear another's burden. If one heavily laden should call another to bear his load, not the least portion of it can be carried by the other even though he be closely related. You can only warn such as fear their Lord unseen and establish regular prayer. And whoever purifies himself does so for the benefit of his own soul (wa man tazakka' Fa Innama Yatazakka Linafsihi), and the destination of all is to Allah."* (35:18)

(Notice here that purification (*tazakka*, from the root word *zakat*) is associated with the purification of the soul. This implies that the *zakat* is not necessarily associated with wealth only. Its scope transcends wealth or money to include purifying the soul of the believer (singular). In that case, the question arises: What responsibility do we have concerning our wealth? The answer is '*sadaqah*' or charity, and its scope and meaning can be found in (9:60). Allah knows best.)

To the discerning eye, the evidence of Allah's creativity is everywhere. *"Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky? With it, We bring out produce of various colors. And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of color, and black intense in hue. And so among men and beasts and cattle are they of various colors. Those truly are in awe of Allah among His servants who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving."* (35:27-28)

The motif of color that runs through this verse reflects the diversity in Allah's creation. The more we study the depth and extent of Allah's creation, the more it evokes awe in us.

Also, reflect on the words in (35:28): *"Those truly are in awe of Allah among His servants who have knowledge."* The truly knowledgeable believers are humble. They don't suffer from the arrogance of certitude. They know that complete knowledge and certainty belong to Allah alone. They allow for the possibility that they can be wrong. They are open-minded and respectful toward others even when they disagree. It is only the shallow and those with little knowledge – after all, "a little learning is a dangerous thing" - who are convinced that they are always right and will argue endlessly on issues on which they are often clueless.

What are the other characteristics of those endowed with knowledge? *"Those who rehearse the Book of Allah, establish regular prayer and spend in charity out of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, and hope for a commerce that will never fail."* (35:29)

Those who receive Allah's Book generally fall into three categories: *"We bestowed this Divine Book unto such of Our servants as We chose. Some of them have done themselves an injustice, some keep halfway between right and wrong, and some are foremost in good deeds by Allah's Will. That is the highest grace."* (35:32)

In other words, true success belongs to the 'Sa'biquun' who races to do good to please Allah. The success of the 'Sa'biquun' in (35:32) is also emphasized in (56:10-12).

In His infinite mercy, Allah gives us plenty of time to reflect and mend our ways. *"If Allah were to punish people for their misdeeds, not a single*

creature would be left alive on earth. He grants them respite till an appointed time. When their hour comes, they shall realize that Allah has been watching over all His servants." (35:45)

(Sura Yasin is a Makki Sura)

Sura Yasin (Verses 36:1-21)

This Sura is usually referred to as the "Heart of the Quran." Some scholars suggest that the abbreviated letters *Ya-Sin* are a title of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), the central figure in Islam (at the center, that is, at the heart) who brought Allah's revelation to us and the Truth of the Hereafter. However, any interpretation of the abbreviated letters (of the 114 Suras in the Quran, 29 Suras have the abbreviated letters - *Al-Muqatta'at* – prefixed to them) must be considered as conjecture as their exact meanings are known to Allah alone. The Sura deals with the principle of Tawhid and humankind's moral responsibility and accountability to Allah. It points to the certainty of resurrection and the coming of Allah's Judgment. (It is for this reason that the Prophet (s.a.w) advised his followers to recite the Sura over the dying and in prayers for the dead.)

The Sura confirms Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w) status as Allah's messenger: *"By the Quran, full of Wisdom ... You are indeed one of the messengers, leading to a straight path."* (36:2-3) The Quran *"is a revelation sent down by Him, the Almighty, the Merciful, so that you may forewarn a heedless people, whose forebears had not been warned."* (36:5-6)

A parable is presented of two messengers who brought the Divine message to the people in a city. The people rejected them, saying, *"You are only men like ourselves ... you do nothing but lie."* (36:15) The response of the messengers is unambiguous: *"Our duty is only to deliver the clear message to you."* (36:17) When the messengers warn the people that they are *"transgressing all bounds,"* (36:19), *"from the farthest end of the city a man*

came running, saying, "O my people! Obey the messengers. Obey those who ask for no reward of you and who are themselves guided." (36:20-21)

(Scholars suggest that reference to the "farthest" or the outskirts of the city implies that the humble and the vulnerable who live at the margin of society often see the Truth before wealthy city dwellers who tend to be steeped in arrogance. Allah knows best.)

He was a humble man of conviction from the fringe of the city, far from the center of affluence and power. *"As for me, why should I not worship Him who has brought me into being and to Whom you all will be brought back? How could I take besides Him other gods whose intercession would not be of any benefit to me, nor could they save me if the Most Compassionate intended to harm me? Indeed, I would then be clearly astray."* (36:22-24)

Notice the combination of humility and grace in the words the man uses. He could have said, "You people are on the wrong path, and unless you believe the messengers and embrace the Truth, you will be punished." Instead, he put himself at the center of his reasoning and said, "Why should I not worship Him who created me and to Whom you will all return? If I did not worship my Creator, I would go astray."

There is no accusation or finger-pointing. The man simply states what animates his faith, hoping to persuade his listeners to embrace what the messengers were telling them, that is, to accept the reality of One Creator. He may not have had any worldly possessions but he had the courage of his conviction and did the best he could, without worrying about any outcome, for he knew in his heart that any outcome would be decided by Allah alone. The Quran does not tell us directly if the man was killed or died a natural death but we learn that he failed to persuade his people to follow the messengers. The fact, however, that he fearlessly told the people of the

town to heed the messengers brought him the ultimate reward of paradise.

The Quran quotes his statement as he entered paradise after his death:

"Then he was told by the angels, 'Enter Paradise!' He said, 'If only my people knew of how my Lord has forgiven me and made me one of the honorable.'"

(36:27)

The lesson is as simple as it is profound: Allah records all good deeds driven by sincere intentions, no matter how small or trivial they may seem to the world. Allah is the Ultimate Witness and that's all we need. For any good deed, Allah may bless us with Jannatul Firdous. To think that our good deeds – be it in speaking truth to power or in charitable donations and such – may not make any difference because the problems and the difficulties seem so overwhelming is to be trapped in Shaitan's mode of thinking.

As for the people of the town, *"After him, We did not send an army from heaven to destroy them, nor did We need to send down any. A single blast and they became as still and silent as ashes ..."* (36:28-29)

Several verses ask people to reflect on the signs of Allah, two of which are:

"One of Our signs is the lifeless soil which We bring into life and let the grains grow out of it for their sustenance. We furnish it with gardens of palm trees and vineyards, and cause springs to gush out of it." (36:33-34) And,

"Limitless in His glory is He who has created pairs in whatever the earth produces, and in humankind's own selves, and of numerous living things they know nothing of." (36:36)

When they can, believers are required to feed those who may not have the means to feed themselves. It is implied in the verse in which disbelievers mock believers: *"And when they are told, 'spend out of the bounties with which Allah has provided you,' the unbelievers say to those who believe, 'Shall we feed those whom, if Allah had so willed, He would have fed*

Himself? You are nothing but in manifest error." (36:47)

(One characteristic of the deniers of faith is that they do not encourage the feeding of the indigent (107:3))

As for resurrection, when the trumpet blows, "... *They will arise from their graves and hasten toward their Lord. They will say, 'Woe to us! Who has roused us from our resting place? This is what the Merciful has promised: The messengers indeed told the truth!'"* (36:51-52)

Believers who are blessed by Allah with paradise "*shall have joy in whatever they do*" (36:57) but the wrongdoers will get their due: "... *Did I not tell you, O children of Adam, not to worship Shaitan, your declared foe, but to worship Me? That would have been the straight path! But he did lead astray a great multitude of you. Did you not, then, understand? This, then, is the hell of which you were warned again and again! Endure it today as an outcome of your persistent denial of the truth!"* (36:60-64)

The miraculous nature of chemical engineering that is photosynthesis is suggested in the verse: "*The same Who produces for you fire out of the green tree when behold! You kindle therewith (your own fires)!"* (36:80)

(One of the most visible signs of Allah's creation – His *Ayat* – is a living entity we see every day and one that we often take for granted. It is the tree, from the humble thistle to the mighty redwood. If only we could see inside a tree! The root takes water from the earth and sends it up the trunk to the leaves against gravity using the capillary force. Chlorophyll, the pigment that makes leaves green, combines water with sunlight and CO₂ that the tree breathes in from the air, producing carbohydrates, which is food for it to grow. It also separates the toxin carbon and stores it in its trunk and breathes out the oxygen that we breathe to survive!

Photosynthesis as a sublime feat of chemical engineering could only have

been designed by the Creator. As the American poet Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918) wrote: I think that I shall never see/A poem lovely as a tree .../Poems are made by fools like me,/But only God can make a tree.)

The Sura concludes with a statement affirming Allah's majesty and power and the Truth of the Hereafter that is at the core of Divine Revelation:

"Surely, When He intends a thing, His command is, 'Be', and it is! So, glory to Him who has control of all things. To Him shall you be brought back!"
(36:82-83)

(Sura Saffat is a Makki Sura)

Sura As-Saffat (The Ranks) (verses 37:1-182)

Like Sura Yasin before it, Sura As-Saffat deals with resurrection and the accountability of human beings to Allah for their action on earth. Since humankind is in constant need of guidance, there are additional references to some of the stories of the earlier prophets, including stories of prophets Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Lut, Ilyas and Yunus (AS).

As in Sura Al-Araf, scenes from the Hereafter are presented as though they are happening here and now. (37:22-32) To move seamlessly from the temporal to the eternal is a characteristic of the Divine discourse.

The familiar story of Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail reappears in this Sura: *"And when Ismail reached adulthood, his father said to him, 'My son, it has been revealed to me in a dream that I should sacrifice you, so tell me what you think?'"* (37:102)

Ismail responded: *"Father, do as you are bidden. God willing, you shall find me steadfast."* (37:102)

As the father takes out the blade and puts it to his son's throat, Divine command rescues both: *"We called out to him, saying, 'Ibrahim, you have*

fulfilled what you were ordered in the dream.' Thus do We reward the righteous. This was indeed a trial. We replaced him with a great sacrifice and left him thus to be remembered among later generations. Peace be upon Ibrahim! Thus indeed do We reward those who do right." (37:104-110)

The refrain, "*Thus indeed do We reward those who do right*" occurs in verses (37:80), (37:121), (37:131) to honor prophets Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Harun, and Ilyas (AS). The story of Yunus (AS) that we read in (21:87-88) and again in (68:48-50) is also narrated in verses (37:139-147).

The stories are familiar but their messages of purity of purpose and power of faith move and inspire believers with every reading, a unique characteristic of the Quran. The Quran retells many stories of prophets and events in different Suras but always with subtle differences in context and meaning that we can understand and appreciate only with purposeful readings. The Quran does not repeat itself. It is a linguistic miracle in that it tells stories that may appear the same to the undiscerning heart but convey nuanced timeless truths through each telling.

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