

Part 26 Surah 48 Al-Ahqaf Verses 7-12

A Wild Claim

The surah now discusses their attitude towards the Prophet and his true message, establishing the truth of revelation as it has already established the truth of God's oneness:

Whenever Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, the unbelievers describe the truth when it is delivered to them: 'This is plain sorcery.' (7)

Do they say: 'He has invented it himself'? Say: 'If I have invented it, you cannot be of the least help to me against God. He is fully aware of what you say amongst yourselves about it. Sufficient is He as a witness between me and you. He is Much-Forgiving, Ever- Merciful.' (8)

Say: 'I am not the first of God's messengers. I do not know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow what is being revealed to me. I am only a plain warner.' (9)

Say: 'Have you thought: what if this Qur'an is really from God and you reject it? What if a witness from among the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity [to earlier scriptures], and has believed in it while you glory in your arrogance? God does not guide wrongdoers.' (10)

The unbelievers say of those who believe: 'If this [message] were any good, these people would not have preceded us in accepting it.' Since they refuse to be guided by it, they will always say, 'This is an ancient falsehood.' (11)

Yet before this the book of Moses was revealed as a guide and a [sign of God's] grace. This book confirms it in the Arabic tongue, to warn the wrongdoers and to give good news to those who do good. (12)

The surah first rebukes them for the reception they gave to God's revelations when it is given 'in all their clarity', free of ambiguity, leaving no room for doubt. Besides, it presents the indisputable truth. Yet they describe this revelation as 'plain sorcery'. As we all know, truth is vastly different from sorcery; the two cannot be confused or viewed in the same way.

Thus the surah begins its discussion by refuting their ridiculous claims. It then picks up on their other claim alleging that the Prophet had 'invented it'. It states this in the form of a question, not a report, giving the impression that such a thing cannot be made or at least is unlikely to be made: "Do they say: 'He has invented it himself'? ... (8) What a shameless claim!

The Prophet is instructed to reply to them in all the politeness that fits his position as a prophet of God, reflecting his understanding of his Lord and his mission, as well as his knowledge of the true power and values in the universe:

message as it is revealed to him. *I do not know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow what is being revealed to me...*" (9)

He gets on with the task of delivering his message, not because of any knowledge he has of the realm that lies beyond human perception, nor because of any information given to him about what will happen to him, his people or his message. He simply follows instructions, trusting his Lord, submitting himself to Him. The future is unknown to him; its secrets are with his Lord and he does not seek to know them. He has all the reassurance he needs, and he realizes that the proper attitude for him is not to look beyond the limits of the mission he has been assigned: "I am only a plain warner." (9)

Those advocates of Islam endowed with profound insight into its message follow in the footsteps of the Prophet and find the same reassurance. They carry on with their advocacy of the Divine message seeking neither personal gain nor self interest. They do not know what the future holds for it or for them. They do not ask their Lord for evidence; they have all the evidence they need in their hearts. Nor do they pray for any special favour; it is sufficient favour for them that they follow this line. They discharge their duty, and this is enough for them. They do not overstep the fine line God has demarcated for them.

The surah then puts before the unbelievers a witness who is close at hand and whose testimony is particularly relevant because he belongs to an earlier Divine religion whose followers are aware of the nature of revelation:

Say: 'Have you thought: what if this Qur'an is really from God and you reject it? What if a witness from among the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity [to earlier scriptures], and has believed in it while you glory in your arrogance? God does not guide wrongdoers.' (10)

This verse may refer to one or more of the Jews who, knowing the nature of the Torah, recognized that the Qur'an had the same nature as earlier revealed books and, therefore, declared themselves believers in Islam. There are reports that it refers specifically to 'Abdullah ibn Sallam. However, this surah was revealed in Makkah, and 'Abdullah ibn Sallam only adopted Islam when the Prophet later migrated to Madinah. Other reports suggest that this verse was revealed in Madinah, thus confirming that it refers to this particular individual. Still other reports suggest that the verse was revealed in Makkah and hence would not refer to him.

It may also be that the verse refers to a different situation that took place when the Prophet was still advocating his message in Makkah, when a small number of followers of earlier Divine religions adopted Islam. This would have been particularly significant for the idolater Arabs. Hence, the Qur'an refers to it more

"Say: 'If I have invented it, you cannot be of the least help to me against God. He is fully aware of what you say amongst yourselves about it. Sufficient is He as a witness between me and you. He is Much-Forgiving, Ever- Merciful.' (8)

Essentially, the Prophet is instructed to ask them: how, for whose interest and for what objective would I invent it? Would I invent it so that you can believe in and follow me? If this is the case, you cannot help me in the least against God. He will surely hold me to account. What use would it be to me if you follow me, when you cannot give me the slightest support or protection when God punishes me for such invention?

This is a fit response from a Prophet who is instructed by God, and who recognizes no power in the universe other than His. Besides, it is a logical response which, when objectively considered, appears to the addressees to be truly valid. The Prophet makes this response and leaves them to God for judgement: "He is fully aware of what you say amongst yourselves about it..." (8) He is a witness to all that they say and

do, and this is enough to ensure a fair judgement: 'Sufficient is He as a witness between me and you!' Yet, "He is Much-Forgiving, Ever- Merciful." (8) He may treat you with compassion, bestow His grace on you and guide you, forgiving you your earlier error. It is a response, then, that combines warning with persuasion. It gently touches hearts and makes people realize that the matter is far too serious to be left to their absurdities.

Yet another argument is provided, this time drawing on realities. Why do they reject the idea of a Divine message being given through revelation? Why are they so quick to denounce it as sorcery or as an invention, when there is nothing strange or unusual about it?:

"Say: 'I am not the first of God's messengers. I do not know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow what is being revealed to me. I am only a plain warner.' (9)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not a totally new phenomenon: he was one in a line of God's messengers. His situation was the same as all messengers who preceded him. He was an ordinary human being whom God knew to be suited to deliver His message. Therefore, He gave him His revelations and the Prophet carried out God's orders. This is what a Divine message is like.

When a messenger of God feels this bond, he does not ask God for proof, nor does he request anything special for himself; he simply moves on to deliver God's

than once, delivering a strong counter argument to those idolaters who rejected the Divine message without any basis.

The surah uses a special style in presenting its argument to them: "Have you thought: what if this Qur'an is really from God and you reject it?..." (10) It aims to shake their stubborn rejection and raise a fear within them concerning the eventual result. Since there is a possibility that the Qur'an may really be from God, as Muhammad (peace be upon him) says, should they not take precautions lest their rejection of it brings them to a terrible end? Could all the warnings it provides come true? Would they not be better advised to reflect on the whole matter lest they leave themselves open to all that it warns them against? Taking such precautions is all the wiser, considering that one or more of the people of Divine faiths confirmed that the Qur'an is of the same nature as earlier revealed scriptures, and followed this by declaring their belief in it. By contrast, they, whose language the Qur'an speaks, persist with their rejection. This is indeed blatant wrongdoing as it suppresses the truth. It deserves God's punishment: "God does not guide wrongdoers." (10)

The surah continues to report what the pagan Arabs said about the Qur'an and Islam. It specifically mentions their arrogance as they try to show themselves as superior to the believers:

The unbelievers say of those who believe: 'If this [message] were any good, these people would not have preceded us in accepting it.' Since they refuse to be guided by it, they will always say, 'This is an ancient falsehood.' (11)

Among the earliest Muslims were those who were poor and weak in Makkan society. To the arrogant elders of the Quraysh, this was a point of weakness. They boasted: 'had Islam been good, we would have been the first to recognize its goodness. Those others could not have preceded us in following it. Given our positions, knowledge and understanding, we are better equipped to determine what is good.'

Yet this was not so. What stopped them from accepting Islam was not any doubt that they had about it or that they did not recognize how good and sound it was, but rather the fact that they were too proud to follow Muhammad's lead. They especially feared any loss of their social position or their economic privileges. Moreover they were proud of their ancestors and what they believed in. By contrast, those who were quick to respond to the call of Islam paid little attention to such considerations.

Pride always prevents the arrogant from listening to the voice of sound nature; it precludes them from accepting the truth. Pride and arrogance always make people

stubborn, urging them to seek hollow excuses and make false claims about the truth and its advocates. They will never acknowledge that they are wrong. Indeed, they put themselves at the centre of life, as if they were the pivot around which life itself turns: *Since they refuse to be guided by it, they will always say, 'This is an ancient falsehood.'* (11)

Since they have not acknowledged the truth, then there must be something wrong with it. They could not make a mistake. They try to impress on the masses what they feel of their own infallibility!

The case for revelation concludes with a reference to Moses' scriptures:

Yet before this the book of Moses was revealed as a guide and a [sign of God's] grace. This book confirms it in the Arabic tongue, to warn the wrongdoers and to give good news to those who do good. (12)

The Qur'an repeatedly refers to its bond with earlier Divine books, particularly the one given to Moses, considering that the one given to Jesus was a complement to the Torah, which contains the basic faith and legislation. Hence, Moses' book is defined as '*a guide*', or *imam* in Arabic, and described as '*grace*'. Indeed, all Divine messages are signs of His grace bestowed on earth and its inhabitants, in every sense of the word. It is grace and mercy extended throughout this life and in the life to come. This present book, the Qur'an, "*confirms it in the Arabic tongue.*" It confirms the original source that forms the basis of all Divine religions and also the Divine code of life advocated by all religions. It confirms the true direction shown to humanity to ensure that it remains in contact with its Lord.

The reference to its being in Arabic serves to remind the Arabs of God's favour in choosing them

to be the bearers of His message to humanity and choosing their language for the Qur'an.

The verse also speaks of the nature and function of the message: "*to warn the wrongdoers and to give good news to those who do good.* (12) "