INTRODUCTION TO SURAT An-Naml, 27.

This Sūra is cognate in subject to the one preceding it and the two following it. Its chronological place is also in the same group of four, in the middle Makkan period.

The Fire, the White Hand, and the Rod, in the story of Moses; the speech of birds, the crowds of Jinns and men pitted against a humble ant, and the Hoopoe and the Queen of Sheba, in Solomon's story; the defeat of the plot of the nine wicked men in the story of Šāliḥ; and the crime of sin with open eyes in the story of Lūṭ—lead up to the lessons of true and false worship and the miracles of Allah's grace and revelation.

Summary.—Wonderful is Revelation, like the Fire which Moses saw, which was a glimpse of Allah's Glory, and His Miracles, which searched out those who refused Faith in spite of the light they had received (xxvii. 1-14).

Solomon knew the speech of Birds and had hosts of Jinns and men; yet the wise ant had ample defence against them: the Hoopoe who was absent at his muster, was yet serving him: the Queen of Sheba had a kingdom, but it submitted with conviction to the Wisdom of Solomon and the Kingdom of Allah (xxvii. 15-44).

Fools ascribe ill-luck to godliness as in Šāliḥ's story, or fall into their lusts with their eyes open, as in Lūṭ's story; but their plots and their rage will be foiled by Allah (xxvii. 45-58).

Allah's glory and goodness are supreme over all Creation: Unfaith will yield to Faith in the final adjustment of values: so follow Revelation, serve Allah, and trust in Him (xxvii. 59-93).
An-Naml, or the Ants...

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.

1. Tā. Sin.\(^{3240}\)
These are verses
Of the Qurān, a Book
That makes (things) clear;

2. A Guide; and Glad Tidings
For the Believers,\(^{3241}\)

3. Those who establish regular prayers
And give zakat,
And also have sure faith
In the Hereafter.

4. As to those who believe not
In the Hereafter, We have
Made their deeds pleasing\(^{3242}\)
In their eyes; and so they
Wander blindly.

5. Such are they for whom
A grievous Chastisement is (waiting):
And in the Hereafter theirs
Will be the greatest loss.\(^{3243}\)

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3240. See n. 3137 to xxvi. 1.

3241. Revelation is here presented in three aspects: (1) it explains things, the attributes of Allah, our own position, and the world around; (2) it directs us to right conduct and keeps us from evil; and (3) to those who have Faith and accept its guidance, it gives the good news of forgiveness, purification, and the achievement of salvation.

3242. Those who reject Allah and follow Evil have a good conceit of themselves. Their deeds are pleasing to no one else. As they have rejected Allah’s guidance, they are allowed to hug their own self-conceit, and given further respite for repentance. But they follow their own whims and wander about in distraction, as they have no standards such as guide the godly.

3243. The account will then be made up, and they will be found to be terribly in loss. They will be the worst in loss, for all their self-complacency.
6. As for thee, thou receivest
   The Qur'an from One
   All-Wise, All-Knowing.

7. Behold! Moses said\(^{3244}\)
   To his family: “I perceive
   A fire; soon will I bring you
   From there some information,
   Or I will bring you
   A burning brand (to light
   Our fuel,) that ye may
   Warm yourselves.

8. But when he came
   To the (Fire), a voice
   Was heard: “Blessed are those\(^{3245}\)
   In the Fire and those around:
   And Glory to Allah,
   The Lord of the Worlds.

9. “O Moses! Verily,
   I am Allah, the Exalted
   In Might, the Wise!...

10. “Now do thou throw thy rod!\(^{3246}\)
    But when he saw it
    Moving (of its own accord)
    As if it had been a snake,

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3244. Cf. xx. 9-24. Both there and here there is a reference to the dawn of
   Revelation in the heart of Moses. The points there emphasised will be found in the notes
   to that passage. Here the emphasis is on the wonderful nature of the Fire and the
   wonderful way in which Moses was transformed at the touch of the Light. He was
   travelling in the Sinai desert with his family. Seeking ordinary light, he came upon a Light
   which took him to the highest signs of Allah. No doubt all his inner history had prepared
   him for his great destiny. It is the inner history that matters, and not the place or position
   of a man in the eyes of his ordinary fellows.

3245. Those: in the original the pronoun is in the singular, “man”, which is often
   used with a plural meaning.

3246. Moses was now transported into an entirely new world. What he had taken
   to be an ordinary fire was a gleam of the heavenly light. His own rod or staff was no
   longer the dead piece of wood that had hitherto supported him. It became instinct with
   life, a life that moved, and had the power of offence and defence in it, as all living Good
   must have in its fight with Evil. His own transformation is described in the next note.
He turned back in retreat,  
And retraced not his steps:  
"O Moses!" (it was said),  
"Fear not: truly, in My presence,  
Those called as messengers  
Have no fear,"  

11. "But if any have done wrong  
And have thereafter substituted  
Good to take the place of evil,  
Truly, I am Oft-Forgiving,  
Most Merciful."

12. "Now put thy hand into  
Thy bosom, and it will  
Come forth white without stain  
(Or harm): (these are) among  
The nine Signs (thou wilt take)  
To Pharaoh and his people:  
For they are a people  
Rebellious in transgression."

3247. In this great, new, wonderful world, that was opening out to Moses, he had to get his vision adjusted to his new surroundings, as an ordinary man has to adjust his sight before he can see in any very strong light that is new to him. The staff which had become alive as a snake frightened him: yet it was to be his own instrument of work in his new mission. All fear was to be cast out of his mind, as befitted a man chosen by Allah.

3248. His slaying the Egyptian (n. 3146 to xxvi. 14), however defensible from certain aspects, was yet something from his past that had to be washed off, and Allah, Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful, did it out of His abounding Grace. Nay, more; he was given a pure, Radiant Hand, as a Sign from Allah, as stated in the next verse.

3249. Cf. xx. 22. There the expression is: "Draw thy hand close to thy side." As far as the physical act is concerned, the expressions there and here mean the same thing. Moses had a loose-fitting robe. If he put his hand within the folds of the robe, it would go to his bosom on the side of his body opposite to that from which his hand came; i.e., if it was his right hand it would go to the left side of his bosom. The hand comes out white and radiant, without a stain. Ordinarily if the skin becomes white it is a sign of disease or leprosy. Here it was the opposite. It was a sign of radiance and glory from the higher Light.

3250. The nine Signs: see n. 1091 to vii. 133.
13. But when Our Signs came to them, visibly\textsuperscript{3251}
They said:
"This is sorcery manifest!"

14. And they denied them, though their souls acknowledged them wrongfully and out of pride:
So see what was the end of those who acted corruptly!

SECTION 2.

15. We gave knowledge to David and Solomon:\textsuperscript{3252}
And they both said:
"Praise be to Allah, who has favoured us above many of His servants who believe!\textsuperscript{3253}
And Solomon was David's heir.\textsuperscript{3254}
He said: "O ye people!

3251. The Signs should have clearly opened the eyes of any persons who honestly examined them and thought about them. Those who rejected them were perverse and were going against their own light and inner conviction. That was the aggravating feature of their sin.

3252. Cf. xxii. 78-82. "Knowledge" means such knowledge as leads up to the higher things in life, the Wisdom that was shown in their decisions and judgments, and the understanding that enabled them to fulfill their mission in life. They were both just men and prophets of Allah. The Bible, as we have it, is inconsistent: on the one hand it calls David "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel, xiii. 14, and Acts xiii. 22); and the Christians acclaim Christ as a son of David; but on the other hand, horrible crimes are ascribed to him, which, if he had committed them, would make him a monster of cruelty and injustice. About Solomon, too, while he is described as a glorious king, there are stories of his lapses into sin and idolatry. The Muslim teaching considers them both to be men of piety and wisdom, and high in spiritual knowledge.

3253. They ascribed, as was proper, their knowledge, wisdom, and power to the only true Source of all good, Allah.

3254. The point is that Solomon not only inherited his father's kingdom but his spiritual insight and the prophetic office, which do not necessarily go from father to son.
We have been taught the speech of Birds, and we have been given of everything. This is indeed grace manifest (from Allah.).

17. And before Solomon were marshalled His hosts—of Jinns and men And birds, and they were all kept in order and ranks.

18. At length, when they came to a valley of ants, One of the ants said: "O ye ants, get into your habitations, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you (underfoot) without knowing it."

3255. *Speech of Birds.* The spoken word in human speech is different from the means of communication which birds and animals have between each other. But no man can doubt that they have means of communication with each other, if he only observes the orderly flight of migratory birds or the regulated behaviour of ants, bees, and other creatures who live in communities. The wisdom of Solomon consisted in understanding these things—in the animal world and in the lower fringes of human intelligence.

3256. "Everything": Solomon was a king of power and authority; outside his kingdom he had influence among many neighbouring peoples; he had knowledge of birds, and beasts and plants; he was just and wise, and understood men; and above all, he had spiritual insight, which brought him near to Allah. Thus he had something of all kinds of desirable gifts. And with true gratitude he referred them to Allah, the Giver of all gifts.

3257. Besides the literal meaning, there are two symbolical meanings. (1) All his subjects of varying grades of intelligence, taste, and civilization, were kept in due order and co-operation, by his discipline, justice, and good government. (2) The gifts of various kinds, which he possessed (see last note), he used in proper order and co-ordination, as if they were a well disciplined army, thus getting the best possible results from them.

3258. This verse and the next, read together, suggest the symbolical meaning as predominant. The ant, to outward appearance, is a very small and humble creature. In the great pomp and circumstances of the world, she (generic feminine in Arabic) may be neglected or even trampled on by a people who mean her no harm. Yet, by her...
19. So he smiled, amused
   At her speech; and he said:
   “O my Lord! so order me
   That I may be grateful
   For Thy favours, which Thou
   Has bestowed on me and
   On my parents, and that
   I may work the righteousness
   That will please Thee:
   And admit me, by Thy Grace,
   To the ranks of Thy
   Righteous Servants.”

20. And he took a muster
   Of the Birds; and he said:
   “Why is it I see not
   The Hoopoe? Or is he
   Among the absentees?”

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wisdom, she carries on her own life within her own sphere (“habitations”) unmolested,
and makes a useful contribution to the economy of the world. So there is room for the
humblest people in the spiritual world.

3259. The counterpart to the position of the humble ant is the position of a great
king like Solomon. He prays that his power and wisdom and all other
gifts may be used
for righteousness and for the benefit of all around him. The ant being in his thoughts,
we may suppose that he means particularly in his prayer that he may not even unwittingly
tread on humble beings in his preoccupations with the great things of the world.

3260. The righteousness which pleases the world is often very different from the
righteousness which pleases Allah. Solomon prays that he may always take Allah's Will
as his standard, rather than the standards of men.

3261. In the Kingdom of Allah, righteousness is the badge of citizenship. And
although there are great and noble grades (see n. 586 to iv. 69), the base of that
citizenship is the universal brotherhood of righteousness. The greatest in that Kingdom
are glad and proud to pray for that essential badge.

3262. Solomon was no idle or easy-going king. He kept all his organisation strictly
up to the mark, both his armies literally and his forces (metaphorically). His most mobile
arm was the Birds, who were light on the wing and flew and saw everything like efficient
scouts. One day he missed the Hoopoe in his muster. The Hoopoe is a light, graceful
creature, with elegant plumage of many colours, and a beautiful yellow crest on his head,
which entitles him to be called a royal bird.
21. "I will certainly punish him
With a severe punishment,
Or execute him, unless he
Bring me a clear reason
(For absence)."

22. But the Hoopoe tarried not
Far: he (came up and) said:
"I have compassed
Which thou hast not compassed,
And I have come to thee
From Sabā’
with tidings true.

23. "I found (there) a woman
Ruling over them and provided
With every requisite; and she
Has a magnificent throne.

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3263. Sabā’ may reasonably be identified with the Biblical Sheba (1 Kings x. 1-10). It is further referred to in the Sūra called after its name: xxxiv. 15-20. It was a city in Yemen, said to have been three days' journey (say 50 miles) from the city of San‘ā’. A recent German explorer, Dr. Hans Helfritz, claims to have located it in what is now Ḥadhramaut territory. The famous dam of Ma‘rib made the country very prosperous, and enabled it to attain a high degree of civilization ("provided with every requisite" in the next verse). The Queen of Sheba therefore rightly held up her head high until she beheld the glories of Solomon.

3264. The Queen of Sheba (by name Bilqis in Arabian tradition) came apparently from Yemen, but she had affinities with Abyssinia and possibly ruled over Abyssinia also. The Ḥabasha tribe (after whom Abyssinia was named) came from Yemen. Between the southern coast of Yemen and the north-eastern coast of Abyssinia there are only the Straits of Bab-al-Mandab, barely twenty miles across. In the 10th or 11th century B.C. there were frequent invasions of Abyssinia from Arabia, and Solomon’s reign of 40 years is usually synchronised with B.C. 992 to 952. The Sabaeans and Himyarite alphabets in which we find the south Arabian pre-Islamic inscriptions, passed into Ethiopic, the language of Abyssinia. The Abyssinians possess a traditional history called “The Book of the Glory of Kings” (Kebrā Nagast), which has been translated from Ethiopic into English by Sir E.A. Wallis Budge (Oxford, 1932). It gives an account of the Queen of Sheba and her only son Menyelek I, as founders of the Abyssinian dynasty.

3265. Provided with every requisite: I take this to refer not only to the abundance of spices and gems and gold in her country, but to sciences and arts, as well.
24. "I found her and her people 
Worshipping the sun besides 
Allah: 3266

Satan has made their deeds 
Seem pleasing in their eyes, 
And has kept them away 
From the Path,—so 
They receive no guidance,—

25. "So that they worship not 
Allah who brings forth3267 
What is hidden in the heavens 
And the earth, and knows 
What ye hide and what 
Ye reveal.

26. "Allah!—there is no god 
But He!—Lord of the Throne3268 
Supreme!"

3266. The ancient religion of the people of Sabā (the Himyar or Sabæans) consisted 
in the worship of the heavenly bodies, the sun, the planets, and the stars. Possibly the 
cult was connected with that of Chaldaea, the home-land of Abraham: see vi. 75-79 and 
notes thereon. Yemen had easy access to Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf by way of 
the sea, as well as with Abyssinia. That accounts for the Christians of Najrān and the 
Jewish dynasty of kings (e.g. Zū-NUwās, d. 525 A.D.) who persecuted them in the century 
before Islām,—also for the Christian Abyssinian Governor Abraha and his discomfiture in 
the year of the Prophet’s birth (S.cv.), say 570 A.D. Jewish-Christian influences were 
powerful in Arabia in the sixth century of the Christian era.

The religion of these Sabaeans (written in Arabic with a Sin) should not be 
confounded with that of the Sabians (with a Sad), as to whom see n. 76 to ii. 62.

3267. The false worship of the Sabaeans is here exposed in three ways: (1) that they 
were self-satisfied with their own human achievements, instead of looking up to Allah; 
and (2) that the light of the heavenly bodies which they worshipped was only dependent 
on the true Light of Allah, which extends over heaven and earth; the Creator should be 
worshipped rather than His Creation; and (3) Allah knows the hidden secrets of men’s 
alleys as well as the objects which they openly profess: are false worshippers really only 
worshiping their own selves, or the “sins they have a mind to” and are therefore afraid 
to go to Allah, Who knows all?

3268. The messenger (Hoopoe) is a pious bird, as befits a messenger of Solomon. 
After mentioning the false worship of the Sabaeans, he pronounces the Creed of Unity, 
and emphasises Allah’s attribute as Lord of the Great Throne, in order to make it clear =
27. (Solomon) said: “Soon shall we see whether thou hast told the truth or lied! 3269

28. “Go thou, with this letter of mine, and deliver it to them: then draw back from them, and (wait to) see what answer they return”...

29. (The Queen) said: “Ye chiefs! Here is delivered to me—A letter worthy of respect.

30. “It is from Solomon, and is (As follows): ‘In the name3270 of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful:

31. “Be ye not arrogant against me, but come to me in submission (To the true Religion).’ ”

SECTION 3.

32. She said: “Ye chiefs! Advise me in (this) My affair: no affair Have I decided Except in your presence.”

3269. Solomon does not doubt his messenger’s plea that he has scouted a new country, but wants to test whether he has loosened the rein of his imagination in describing its splendours or its worship.

3270. Solomon expressly begins his letter with the formula of the true and universal Religion of Unity, and he invites to the true Faith the new people with whom he establishes honourable relations, not for worldly conquest but for the spreading of the Light of Allah.
33. They said: "We are endued
With strength, and given
To vehement war:
But the command is
With thee; so consider
What thou wilt command."

34. She said: "Kings, when they
Enter a country, despoil it,
And make the noblest
Of its people its meanest
Thus do they behave.

35. "But I am going to send
Him a present, and (wait)
To see with what (answer)
Return (my) ambassadors."

36. Now when (the embassy) came
to Solomon, he said:
"Will ye give me abundance
In wealth? But that which
Allah has given me is better
Than that which He has
Given you! Nay it is ye
Who rejoice in your gift!"

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3271. The character of Queen Bilqis, as disclosed here, is that of a ruler enjoying great wealth and dignity, and the full confidence of her subjects. She does nothing without consulting her Council, and her Council are ready to carry out her commands in all things. Her people are manly, loyal, and contented, and ready to take the field against any enemy of their country. But their queen is prudent in policy, and is not willing to embroil her country in war. She has the discrimination to see that Solomon is not like ordinary kings who conquer by violence. Perhaps in her heart she has a ray of the divine light already, though her people are yet Pagans. She wishes to carry her people with her in whatever she does, because she is as loyal to them as they are to her. An exchange of presents would probably establish better relations between the two kingdoms. And perhaps she anticipates some spiritual understanding also, a hope which was afterwards realised. In Bilqis we have a picture of womanhood, gentle, prudent, and able to tame the wider passions of her subjects.

3272. Poor Bilqis! she thought she had arranged with womanly tact to conciliate Solomon, and at the same time pacify her warlike subjects! But the effect of the embassy with presents was the very opposite. Solomon took it as an insult that she should send =
37. “Go back to them, and be sure
We shall come to them
With such hosts as they
Will never be able to meet:
We shall expel them
From there in disgrace,
And they will feel
Humbled (indeed).”

38. He said (to his own men):
“Ye Chiefs! which of you
Can bring me her throne\(^\text{3273}\)
Before they come to me
In submission?”

39. A stalwart of the Jinn said:\(^\text{3274}\)
“I will bring it to thee
Before thou rise from thy
Council: indeed I have
Full strength for the purpose,
And may be trusted.”

40. Said one who had knowledge\(^\text{3275}\)
Of the Book: “I will
Bring it to thee before ever
Thy glance returns to thee.
Then when (Solomon) saw it
Placed firmly before him,
He said: “This is

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\(^{3273}\) The throne is symbolical of power and dignity. So far her throne was based on material wealth: Solomon is going to alter it to a basis of Faith and the Religion of Unity.

\(^{3274}\) *Ifrīt*: a large, powerful jinn.

\(^{3275}\) Solomon was thankful to Allah that he had men endowed with such power, and he had the throne of Bilqis transported to his Court and transformed as he desired, without Bilqis even knowing it.
By the grace of my Lord!—

To test me whether I am
Grateful or ungrateful!
And if any is grateful,
Truly his gratitude is (a gain)
For his own soul; but if
Any is ungrateful, truly
My Lord is Free of all Needs,
Supreme in Honour!

He said: "Disguise her throne.
Let us see whether she
Is guided (to the truth)
Or is one of those who
Are not rightly guided."

So when she arrived,
She was asked, "Is this
Thy throne?" She said,
"It seems the same.
And knowledge was bestowed
On us in advance of this.
And we have submitted
To Allah (in Islam)."

3276. If Solomon had been ungrateful to Allah, i.e., if he had worked for his own selfish or worldly ends, he could have used the brute strength of Ifrīt to add to his worldly strength and glory. Instead of it he uses the higher magic of the Book,—of the Spirit—to transform the throne of Bilqis for her highest good, which means also the highest good of her subjects, by the divine Light. He had the two alternatives, and he chooses the better, and he thus shows his gratitude to Allah for the Grace He had given him.

3277. Man's gratitude to Allah is not a thing that benefits Allah, for Allah is high above all needs: it benefits a man's own soul and gives him higher rank in the life to come. Per contra, man's ingratitude will not detract from Allah's Glory and Honour or the value of Allah's generous gifts to man: for Allah is supreme in honour, glory, and generosity. Karīm in Arabic involves all three significations.

3278. The throne having been disguised, it will be a test to see whether Bilqis recognises it as her own or not.

3279. Bilqis stands the test. She knows it was her throne, yet not exactly the same, for it was now much better. And she is proud of her good fortune, and acknowledges, for herself and her people, with gratitude, the light which was given to them by Allah, by which they recognised Allah's prophet in Solomon, and received the true Religion with all their will and heart and soul.
43. And he diverted her From the worship of others Besides Allah: for she was (Sprung) of a people That had no faith.

44. She was asked to enter The lofty Palace: but When she saw it, she Thought it was a lake Of water, and she (tucked up Her skirts), uncovering her legs. He said: "This is But a palace paved Smooth with slabs of glass."
She said: "O my Lord! I have indeed wronged My soul: I do (now) Submit (in Islām), with Solomon, To the Lord of the Worlds."

3280. Some Commentators and Translators adopt an alternative construction for the last clause of the last verse and the first clause of this verse. They understand the former to be spoken by Solomon and to mean, 'we had knowledge of Allah's Message and accepted it before her.' They understand the latter to mean, 'the worship of others besides Allah diverted her (from the true Religion).' If we accept the construction adopted in this Translation, the visit to Solomon confirmed the true Faith of Bilqis and prevented her from lapsing into her ancestral false worship.

3281. Bilqis, having been received with honour on her arrival, and having accepted the transformation of her throne, placed presumably in an outer building of the Palace, is asked to enter the great Palace itself. Its floor was made of slabs of smooth polished glass, that glistened like water. She thought it was water, and tucked up her clothes to pass through it, showing her bare feet and ankles. This was a very undignified position for a woman, especially one of the position of a Queen. Solomon immediately told her the real facts, when she felt grateful, and joined herself with Solomon in praising Allah.

3282. A gentle leader points out the truth. Instead of resenting it, the new entrant is grateful; acknowledges his own mistake freely and frankly; and heartily joins with the Teacher in the worship of Allah, the Source of all truth and knowledge.
SECTION 4.

45. We sent (aforetime),
To the Thamūd, their brother\textsuperscript{3283}
Sālih, saying, “Serve Allah”:
But behold, they became
Two factions quarrelling
With each other.

46. He said: “O my people!
Why ask ye to hasten on
The evil before the good?\textsuperscript{3284}
If only ye ask Allah for forgiveness,
Ye may hope to receive mercy.”

47. They said: “Ill omen
Do we augur from thee
And those that are with thee”.
He said: “Your ill omen
Is with Allah; yea, ye are
A people under trial.”\textsuperscript{3285}

48. There were in the City
Nine men,
Who made mischief in the land,
And would not reform.\textsuperscript{3286}

\textsuperscript{3283} The main story of the Thamūd, who were broken up into two factions, the rich oppressing the poor and keeping them out of the good things of life and the test case of the She-camel, will be found in xxvi. 141-159 and the notes thereon. The point here is the secret plot of the nine men against the Prophet of Allah, whose teaching, they thought, brought them ill-luck; but what they called ill-luck was the just punishment from Allah for their own ill-deeds. Their plot was foiled, and the whole community, which was involved in evil, was destroyed.

\textsuperscript{3284} Cf. xiii. 6. The evil-doers were really hastening on their own punishment by their feuds against the poor. The advocates of justice were not bringing ill-luck to them. They were showing the way to ward it off. Their own injustice was bringing on their disaster.

\textsuperscript{3285} All evil unpunished is not evil condoned, but evil given a chance for reform. They are on trial, by the mercy of Allah. What they call “ill omen” is really the just punishment for their ill-deeds, and that punishment rests with Allah.

\textsuperscript{3286} They had made up their minds to wage a relentless war against justice. They did not destroy justice, but justice destroyed them.
49. They said: “Swear
A mutual oath by Allah
That we shall make
A secret night attack
On him and his people, 3287
And that we shall then
Say to his heir (when he
Seeks vengeance): ‘We were not
Present at the slaughter
Of his people, and we are
Positively telling the truth’.”

50. They plotted and planned, 3288
But We too planned,
Even while they perceived it not.

51. Then see what was the end
Of their plot!—this,
That We destroyed them
And their people, all (of them).

52. Now such were their houses,—
In utter ruin,—because
They practised wrong-doing.
Verily in this is a Sign
For people of knowledge.

53. And We saved those
Who believed and practised
Righteousness.

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3287. A most dastardly plot, because (1) it was to be secret, (2) by night, (3) taking
their victims unawares, and (4) because careful provision was made that they should all
tell lies together, saying that they knew nothing about it, in order to evade the vengeance
which Sālih’s heirs (if any were left) or his tribe might want to exact! And yet such were
exactly the plots laid against the holy Prophet himself.

3288. Cf. iii. 54. Their secret plotting is all known to Allah, but of Allah’s just and
beneficent plans they know nothing. And the wicked must come to an evil end.
54. (We also sent) Lūt.\(^{3289}\)

(As a messenger): behold, He said to his people, "Do ye do what is indecent Though ye see (its iniquity)?

55. Would ye really approach men In your lusts rather than Women? Nay, ye are A people (grossly) ignorant.\(^{3290}\)

56. But his people gave No other answer but this: They said, "Drive out The followers of Lūt from Your city: these are Indeed men who want To be clean and pure."\(^{3291}\)

57. But We saved him And his family, except His wife: her We destined To be of those Who lagged behind.

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3289. The story of Lūt is referred to elsewhere. The passages to which reference may be made here are: xxvi. 160-175, and vii. 80-84. But the point emphasised here is that the crime of the Cities of the Plain was against their own nature, and they saw its enormity, and yet they indulged in it. Can degradation go further? His wife was not apparently a Believer. Her previous sympathy with the sinful people "destined her" (verse 57 below) to a miserable end, as she lagged behind and shared in the destruction of her kinsfolk.

3290. The ignorance referred to here is the spiritual Ignorance, the Ignorance of how grossness and sins that bring shame on their own physical and moral nature are doomed to destroy them: it is their own loss. That they knew the iniquity of their sins has already been stated in the last verse. That knowledge makes their spiritual Ignorance all the more culpable, just as a man consciously deceiving people by half-truths is a greater liar than a man who tells lies inadvertently.

3291. Cf. vii. 82-84. Instead of being ashamed on account of the consciousness of their own guilt, they attack the pure ones with their sarcasms, as if not they but the pure ones were in the wrong in trying to set them on the right way.
58. And We rained down on them
A shower (of brimstone):
And evil was the shower
On those who were admonished
(But heeded not)!

SECTION 5.

59. Say: Praise be to Allah,
And Peace on His servants
Whom He has chosen
(For His Message). (Who)
Is better?—Allah or
The false gods they associate
(With Him)?

60. On who has created
The heavens and the earth,
And who sends you down
Rain from the sky?
Yea, with it We cause
To grow well-planted orchards
Full of beauty and delight:
It is not in your power
To cause the growth

3292. Allah's revelation having been described as Light, Guidance, and Mercy, we ought all to be grateful to Allah for vouchsafing His revelation. We ought also to appreciate the services of Allah's Messengers, who are chosen to deliver His Message: we ought to send salutations of Peace on them, instead of plotting, as the wicked do, for their removal or persecution, or banishment or death. For these Prophets of Allah undergo every kind of hardship and forego every kind of advantage or pleasure in life for serving mankind. And Allah is truth and goodness, and all our fancies of false worship are falsehoods and evils. Shall we prefer falsehood and evil to truth and goodness?

3293. The order, beauty, and grandeur of the Universe are appealed to. They show unity of design and purpose. How can unjust, ignorant, foolish, heedless, false men think of a multiplicity of gods, or of any god, besides the One True God?

3294. To make a single seed germinate and grow into a tree is beyond man's power. When it comes to a great well-laid-out garden of beauty and delight, no one would think it grew up of itself without a Gardener's consummate art. And the orchard is more than the trees in it: there is design and beauty in their arrangement: proper spaces have to
Of the trees in them. (Can there be Another) god besides Allah?
Nay, they are a people
Who swerve from justice.

61. Or, who has made the earth
Firm to live in; made
Rivers in its midst; set
Thereon mountains immovable; 3295
And made a separating bar
Between the two seas 3296
(Can there be another) god
Besides Allah? Nay, most
Of them know not.

62. Or, who listens to the
Distressed when he calls
On Him, and Who relieves 3297
His suffering, and makes you
(Mankind) inheritors of the
earth? 3298
(Can there be another) god
Besides Allah? Little it is
That ye heed!

= be left between them for the growth of their roots, for the aeration of the soil beneath them, and for the penetration of air and sunlight between their branches. How can any one then think of the wonderful Universe as a whole, without thinking of the far higher Unity of Design, the evidence of the One True Allah?

3295. Cf. xvi. 15 and notes 2038 and 2039. The terra firma, the flowing water, and the cycle of water circulation—sea, vapour, clouds, rain, rivers, and sea again—all one and yet all distinct, with a sort of wonderful barrier between salt water and fresh water: can man see all this and yet be ignorant of Allah?

3296. Cf. xxv. 53 and notes 3111 and 3112.

3297. Besides the evidence of external nature, there is the still more intimate evidence in man's inner conscience and heart. Allah listens to man's cry of agony and relieves his suffering, and He has given him superiority over other creation on this earth, through his mind and soul. Is man then going to run after inferior beings and forget Allah?

63. Or, who guides you
Through the depths of darkness
On land and sea, and who
Sends the winds as heralds\(^{3299}\)
Of glad tidings, going before
His Mercy? (Can there be
Another) god besides Allah?—
High is Allah above what
They associate with Him!

64. Or, who originates Creation,
Then repeats it,\(^{3300}\)
And who gives you sustenance
From heaven and earth?\(^{3301}\)
(Can there be another) god
Besides Allah? Say, "Bring forth
Your argument, if ye
Are telling the truth!"\(^{3302}\)

65. Say: None in the heavens
Or on earth, except Allah,
Knows what is hidden:\(^{3303}\)
Nor can they perceive
When they shall be raised
Up (for Judgment).

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\(^{3299}\) Cf. xxv. 48, n. 3104. After external nature, our attention was drawn to our
inner consciousness; after that, it is drawn here to our social and collective life, in which
we use the forces of nature for international intercourse, trade, agriculture, production,
and economic well-being generally. In the next verse, we are asked to contemplate
creation from its primeval stages, through its intermediate processes, to the final Destiny in
a new Creation—a new heaven and a new earth.

\(^{3300}\) Cf. x. 34, and n. 1428.

\(^{3301}\) Sustenance: of course in the spiritual as well as the material sense.

\(^{3302}\) All the arguments point to the Unity of Allah: there is none whatever against
it.

\(^{3303}\) The existence of Allah is certain. But nothing else can be known with certainty
to our knowledge. He has told us of the Hereafter, and therefore we know it is true.
But those who do not believe in Allah,—what knowledge or certainty can they have? Even
when it is actually coming, they will not have the sense to perceive it.
66. Nay, but their knowledge Fails as to the Hereafter, They are in doubt and uncertainty Thereanent; nay, they are blind Thereunto! 3304

SECTION 6.

67. The Unbelievers say: “What! When we become dust,— We and our fathers,—shall we Really be raised (from the dead)?

68. “It is true we were promised This,—we and our fathers Before (us): these are nothing But tales of the ancients.”

69. Say: “Go ye through the earth And see what has been The end of those guilty (Of sin).” 3305

70. But grieve not over them, Nor distress thyself Because of their plots. 3306

71. They also say: “When will This promise (come to pass)? If ye are truthful.”

3304. The Unbelievers are generally materialists, who cannot go beyond the evidence of their physical senses. As to a spiritual vision of the future, their physical senses would only leave them in doubt and uncertainty, while their rejection of the spiritual Light makes them blind altogether to the next world.

3305. Even if the Unbelievers are unwilling to take any doctrine, they have only to observe what has actually happened on the earth, and they will see that evil always came to an evil end, and that Truth and righteousness ultimately won.

3306. Cf. xvi. 127, and n. 2164. The righteous need not worry over the unjust. The plots of the unjust can never defeat or deflect the purpose of Allah.
72. Say: "It may be that some of the events which ye wish to hasten on may be (close) in your pursuit."

73. But verily thy Lord is Full of grace to mankind: Yet most of them are ungrateful.

74. And verily thy Lord knoweth All that their hearts do hide, As well as all that they reveal.

75. And there is nothing Hidden in heaven Or earth, but is (recorded) In a clear record.

76. Verily this Qur-ān doth explain To the Children of Israel Most of the matters In which they disagree.

3307. The Unbelievers—or even men of half-hearted faith—may say, "Why worry over distant future events? Take the day as it comes!" But that is a fallacy. Judgment is certain, and it may be that this very hour may be the hour of doom for any given individual. This is the hour of repentance and amendment. For Allah wishes well to all mankind in spite of their ingratitude.

3308. Cf. xxii. 70, xxxvi. 12, lvii. 22.

3309. The Jews had numerous sects. Some were altogether out of the pale, e.g., the Samaritans, who had a separate Taurāt of their own: they hated the other Jews and were hated by them. But even in the orthodox body, there were several sects, of which the following may be mentioned: (1) the Pharisees, who were literalists, formalists, and fatalists, and had a large body of traditional literature, with which they overlaid the Law of Moses; (2) the Sadducees, who were rationalists, and seemed to have doubted the doctrine of the Resurrection or of a Hereafter; (3) the Essenes, who practised a sort of Communism and Asceticism and prohibited marriage. About many of their doctrines they had bitter disputes, which were settled by the Qur-ān, which supplemented and perfected the Law of Moses. It also explained clearly the attributes of Allah and the nature of Revelation, and the doctrine of the Hereafter.
77. And it certainly is  
A Guide and a Mercy  
To those who believe.

78. Verily thy Lord will decide  
Between them by His Decree:\[3310\]  
And He is Exalted in Might,  
All-Knowing.

79. So put thy trust in Allah:  
For thou art on (the Path  
Of) manifest Truth.

80. Truly thou canst not cause  
The Dead to listen, nor  
Canst thou cause the Deaf  
To hear the call,  
(Especially) when they  
Turn back in retreat.\[3311\]

81. Nor canst thou be a guide  
To the Blind, (to prevent them)  
From straying: only those  
Wilt thou get to listen  
Who believe in Our Signs,  
So they submit.

82. And when the Word is\[3312\]  
Fulfilled against them (the unjust),  
We shall bring forth from the earth

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3310. *Decree: hukm:* the disputes between rival sects can only be settled by the *Decree of Allah,*-(1) in the form of a Revelation, as was done by the Qur-an, or (2) by the logic of events, for hundreds of sects have been extinguished and forgotten in the course of time, and (3) in the *Decree of Judgment* in the Hereafter, when all jarring sects will at length see their errors.

3311. The Prophet’s responsibility was to preach and show the way. Men and women of goodwill had faith and accepted the Message. But he was not responsible for the obstinacy and perversity of men who turned away from Allah’s Signs and rejected the Truth.

3312. *The Word: the Decree or Sentence,* the Decision to end the respite and restore the true values of right and wrong in a new world: their cup of iniquity will then have been full.
A Beast to speak unto them 3313
Because mankind had no
Faith in our signs.

SECTION 7.

83. The Day We shall gather
Together from every people
A troop of those who reject
Our Signs, and they shall
Be kept in ranks. –

84. Until, when they come
(Before the Judgment-seat),
(Allah) will say: “Did ye
Reject My Signs, though ye 3314
Comprehended them not
In knowledge, or what
Was it ye did?”

85. And the Word will be 3315
Fulfilled against them, because
Of their wrong-doing, and they
Will be unable to speak
(In plea).

3313. The Beast will be one of the Signs of the Last Days to come, before the present World passes away and the new World is brought into being. If taklimuhum is read instead of tukallimuhum, it would mean that the Beast would wound them.

3314. The charge against them will be: ‘You had no knowledge, and yet you arrogantly rejected My Signs: is that true, or have you any plea in your defence?’

3315. There will be no plea, because the charge will be only too true. The Decree will be passed and executed.
86. See they not that We
Have made the Night
For them to rest in
And the Day to give
Them light? Verily in this
Are Signs for any people
That believe!

87. And the Day that the Trumpet
Will be sounded—then will be
Smitten with terror those
Who are in the heavens,
And those who are on earth,
Except such as Allah will please
(To exempt): and all shall come
To Him in utter humility.

88. Thou seest the mountains
And thinkest them firmly fixed:
But they shall pass away
As the clouds pass away:
(Such is) the artistry of Allah,
Who disposes of all things\textsuperscript{3319} in perfect order: for He is well acquainted with all that ye do.

89. If any do good, he will have better than it. And they will be secure from terror that Day.

90. And if any do evil, their faces will be thrown headlong into the Fire:\textsuperscript{3320} “Do ye receive a reward other than that which ye have earned by your deeds?”\textsuperscript{3321}

91. For me, I have been commanded to serve the Lord\textsuperscript{3322} of this City. Him Who has sanctified it and to Whom

\textsuperscript{3319} Atqana: to arrange or dispose of things with art, or so as to obtain the most perfect results. The present phenomenal world and the Future that is to be, all have a definite object and purpose in the Plan of Allah, Who knows perfectly what we are, what we do, what we think, and what we need. Who can praise His artistry enough?

\textsuperscript{3320} Headlong: it may be that the very things of which we were proudest, which we considered foremost in our present order of the world, will be the first to go into the Fire, as they are but the window-dressing (=faces) of Evil.

\textsuperscript{3321} There will be no punishment except such as has been deserved by actual conduct in the present life of probation.

\textsuperscript{3322} The Lord of this City. This was spoken in Makkah say about the 5th year before the Hijrat, when the holy Prophet and his adherents were being persecuted as enemies to the cult of Makkah. So far from being against the true spirit of the holy City of Makkah, it was actually in furtherance of that spirit, which had been overlaid by the idolatries and abominations of the Pagan Quraish. They are told that the new Teaching is from the Lord of Makkah itself, the One True God, Who had sanctified it in the time of Abraham. Lest they should think that it was a local or tribal or narrow cult, it is added that He is not only Lord of this City, but Lord of the Worlds, “to Whom belong all things”. It is a universal message; but how sad it would be if the Makkans, among whom it came first, were to reject it?
(Belong) all things:
And I am commanded
To be of those who bow
In Islam to Allah’s Will,–

92. And to rehearse the Qur-ān:3323
And if any accept guidance,
They do it for the good
Of their own souls,
And if any stray, say:
“I am only a Warner”.

93. And say: “Praise be to Allah,
Who will soon show you324
His Signs, so that ye
Shall know them:” and thy Lord
Is not unmindful
Of all that ye do.3325

3323. The duty of the Prophet and his adherents was, first, to accept Islam and
become themselves shining examples of Allah’s grace and mercy, as they in fact were,
and secondly to preach that message and spread that Light to all around. It was not for
them to force it on unwilling people: for any who rejected it would find their own spiritual
loss in such rejection. But they must clearly warn them of the consequences.

3324. In a few years after that, many wonderful things happened that removed the
doubts of the doubters and confirmed the faith of the Believers. They showed how the
logic of events proved the true mission of the holy Prophet. Other things some minds
may not be able to grasp. But the logic of events is for all to see.

3325. Trials and tribulations, persecution and exile, and the patient endurance and
constancy with which they were met by the Believers—all are known to Allah and will
be credited to their account.