INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAT Al-Aḥqāf, 46.

This is the seventh and last Sūra of the Ḥā Mim series. For the general theme and chronological place of these Sūras see the Introduction to S. xl.

The Aḥqaf (mentioned in verse 21) are the long and winding crooked tracts of sand-hills, characteristic of the country of the ʿĀd people, adjoining Hadhramaut and Yaman: see vii. 65, n. 1040. These people had, at that time, probably a fertile irrigated country, but their sins brought on the calamity mentioned in xlvi. 24-25. The lesson of this Sūra is that if the Truth is challenged, the challenge will be duly answered, and Truth vindicated.

Summary.—All Creation has a Purpose behind it: Truth and Revelation will be vindicated, and those who question it will be undone by the very means by which they set such store: the righteous should wait in patience and constancy (xlvi. 1-35).
Al-Ahqāf, or Winding Sand-tracks.

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

1. Ḥā-Mim.⁴⁷⁷⁴

2. The revelation⁴⁷⁷⁵
   Of the Book
   Is from Allah
   The Exalted in Power,
   Full of Wisdom.

3. We created not⁴⁷⁷⁶
   The heavens and the earth
   And all between them
   But for just ends, and
   For a term appointed:
   But those who reject Faith
   Turn away from that
   Whereof they are warned.

4. Say: “Do ye see⁴⁷⁷⁷
   What it is ye invoke
   Besides Allah? Show me
   What it is they
   Have created on earth,

⁴⁷⁷⁴. See Introduction to S. xl.

⁴⁷⁷⁵. This verse is the same as the second verse of the last Sūra, but the theme is worked out differently in the two Sūras. In S. xlv. was shown how deniers of Revelation will at last be humbled until they can no longer deny its truth and power. In this Sūra is shown how Truth and Revelation will be vindicated by patience and constancy (xlvi. 35).

⁴⁷⁷⁶. Cf. xlv. 22. Many things may appear to us in the present world as strange and inexplicable. But everything made by Allah has a just purpose which must be fulfilled. Nothing in this world is permanent: everything is for an appointed term. The Word of Allah alone abides. All else will pass away after it has fulfilled its purpose. But Unbelievers refuse to face the danger of which they are warned.

⁴⁷⁷⁷. Some people may rush thoughtlessly into false worship, because it is the fashion or an ancestral custom, etc. They are asked to pause and see for themselves. Have the false gods or falsehood created anything? (They destroy much). Or have they any share or lot in the things we associate with the heavens,—spiritual well-being, etc.?
Or have they a share
In the heavens?
Bring me a Book⁴⁷⁷⁸
(Revealed) before this,
Or any remnant of knowledge
(Ye may have), if ye
Are telling the truth!

5. And who is more astray⁴⁷⁷⁹
Than one who invokes,
Besides Allah, such as will
Not answer him to the Day
Of Judgment, and who
(In fact) are unconscious
Of their call (to them)?

6. And when mankind
Are gathered together
(At the Resurrection),
They will be hostile
To them and deny
That (men) had worshipped them.

7. When Our Clear Signs
Are rehearsed to them,
The Unbelievers say,
Of the Truth
When it comes to them:⁴⁷⁸⁰
“This is evident sorcery!”

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⁴⁷⁷⁸. ‘Or is there any warrant for you from any earlier revelation, assuming that you
do not believe in this Revelation? Or can you point to the least scrap or remnant of real
knowledge on which you can base what We condemn as your false life?’ No, you cannot.

⁴⁷⁷⁹. As there is no argument at all in favour of your sham worship, what sense
is there in it? Either your false gods are senseless stocks and stones which will never
answer you to the end of Time, being themselves devoid of understanding, or they are
real objects which will disown you at the last. If you worshipped Self, your own misused
faculties will witness against you at the last (xli. 20-23). If you worshipped good men or
prophets, like Jesus, they will disown you (v. 119). Similarly, if you worshipped angels,
they will disown you (xxxiv. 40-41).

⁴⁷⁸⁰. When the truth is actually brought to their doors, they call it sorcery! Cf.
xxxvii. 12-15, and n. 4042.
8. Or do they say,  
"He has forged it"?  
Say: "Had I forged it,  
Then ye have  
No power to help me  
Against Allah.\(^4781\) He knows best  
Of that whereof ye talk  
(So glibly)! Enough is He  
For a witness between me  
And you! And He is  
Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."  

9. :Say "I am not an innovation\(^4782\)  
Among the messengers, nor  
Do I know what will  
Be done with me or  
With you. I follow  
But that which is revealed  
To me by inspiration;  
I am but a Warner  
Open and clear.”

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\(^{4781}\) If I forged a message from myself as one purporting to come from Allah, you would not be able to see me enjoy any of the blessings from Allah which I enjoy: you would not see me calm and relying on Allah, nor would you see me bear the reputation of being a trustworthy man. A liar comes to an evil end. But what about those who talk so glibly and freely about things which they knows not? Allah knows all and He is my witness! According to Ibn Kathir, the verse means that if the Prophet’s claim to be Allah’s messenger would have been a false one, he would have been stricken by a severe punishment from Allah and none had the power to avert that punishment.

\(^{4782}\) 'What is there to forge? All prophets have taught the Unity of Allah and our duty to mankind. I bring no new fangled doctrine, but eternal truths that have been known to good men through the ages. It is to reclaim you that I have come. I do not know what will be your fate for all this callousness, nor what you will do to me. But this I know, that I am preaching truth and righteousness as inspired by Allah. My duty is only to proclaim aloud and clearly the Message entrusted to me by Allah. The rest I leave to Allah.'
Another side of the argument is now presented. 'You pagan Arabs! You are puffed up with pride, though you are an ignorant nation. Among Israel there are men who understand the previous scriptures, and who find in the Qur-ān and its Preacher a true confirmation of the previous scriptures. They accept Islam as a fulfilment of the revelation of Moses himself! (See Deut. xviii. 18-19). And yet you hold back, though the Qur-ān has come in your own language, in order to help you to understand. How unjust and how shameful! In that case, with what face can you seek guidance from Allah?'

There were learned Jews (and Christians) who saw in the holy Prophet the Messenger of Allah foreshadowed in previous Revelations, and accepted Islam. As this is a Makkan Sūra we need not construe this as a reference to 'Abdullāh ibn Salām, whose conversion was in Madīnah only two years before the Prophet's death, unless we accept this particular verse to be so late in date. The sincere Jews were in a position to understand how this Revelation fitted in with all they had learnt about Revelation.

A great many of the early Muslims were in humble positions, and were despised by the Quraish leaders. 'If such men could see any good in Islam, they said, 'there could be no good in it: if there had been any good in it, we should have been the first to see it!' The spiritually blind have such a good conceit of themselves! As they reject it, and as the Revelation is proved to have historic foundations, they can only call it "an old, old falsehood"!'
And seeing that they
Guide not themselves thereby,
They will say, "This is
An (old,) old falsehood!"

12. And before this, was the Book of Moses
As a guide and a mercy:
And this Book confirms (it)
In the Arabic tongue;
To admonish the unjust,
And as Glad Tidings
To those who do right.

13. Verily those who say, "Our Lord is Allah",
And remain firm
(On that Path),
On them shall be no fear,
Nor shall they grieve.

14. Such shall be Companions
Of the Garden, dwelling
Therein (for aye): a recompense
For their (good) deeds.

4786. The last revealed Book which was a Code of Life (Shari'at) was the Book of Moses: for that of Jesus was not such a Code, but merely moral precepts to sweep away the corruptions that had crept in. The Qur-an has the same attitude to it as the teaching of Jesus had to the Law. Jesus said (Matt. v. 17): "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." But the corruptions took new forms in Christian Churches: an entirely new Shari'at became necessary, and this was provided in Islam.

4787. To say, "Our Lord is Allah" is to acknowledge that we owe no service to any creature, and shall render none: Allah shall have our exclusive devotion. "To remain firm on that Path" is shown by our conduct: we prove that we love Allah and all His creatures, and will unflinchingly do our duty in all circumstances.

4788. Cf. ii. 38. The phrase occurs in numerous other places, with a new application on each occasion. Here, if our claim is true that 'our Lord is Allah', what fear can possibly come on us, or what calamity can there be to cause us grief? For our Lord is our Cherisher, Defender, and Helper, our Hope and our Comfort, which can never fail.
15. We have enjoined on man 4789
Kindness to his parents:
In pain did his mother
Bear him, and in pain
Did she give him birth.
The carrying of the (child)
To his weaning is
(A period of) thirty months. 4790
At length, when he reaches
The age of full strength 4791
And attains forty years,
He says, "O my Lord!
Grant me that I may be
Grateful for Thy favour
Which Thou hast bestowed
Upon me, and upon both
My parents, and that I
May work righteousness
Such as Thou mayest approve;


4790. In xxxi. 14 the time of weaning was stated to be at the age of two years, i.e.,
24 months. See also ii. 233. That leaves six months as the minimum period of human
gestation after which the child is known to be viable. This is in accordance with the latest
ascertained scientific facts. The average period is 280 days, or ten times the inter­
menstrual period, and of course the average period of weaning is much less than 24
months.

The maximum period of breast-feeding (2 years) is again in accordance with the time
that the first dentition is ordinarily completed in a human child. The lower milk incisors
in the centre come out between the 6th and 9th months; then come out the milk teeth
at intervals, until the canines appear. The second molars come out at about 24 months,
and with them the child has a complete apparatus of milk teeth. Nature now expects him
to chew and masticate and be independent of his mother's milk completely. On the other
hand it hurts the mother to feed from the breast after the child has a complete set of
milk teeth. The permanent teeth begin at the sixth year, and the second molars come
at 12 years. The third molars are the wisdom teeth, which may appear at 18 to 20 years,
or not at all.

4791. The age of full strength (ashudd) is held to be between 18 and 30 or 32.
Between 30 and 40 the man is in his best manhood. After that he begins to look to his
growing issue, and rightly commends the new generation to Allah. Perhaps his spiritual
faculties also gain the upper hand after 40.
And be gracious to me
In my issue. Truly
Have I turned to Thee
And truly do I submit
(To Thee) in Islam.”

16. Such are they from whom
We shall accept the best\textsuperscript{4792}
Of their deeds and pass by
Their ill deeds: (they shall
Be) among the Companions
Of the Garden: a promise
Of truth, which was
Made to them
(In this life).

17. But (there is one)\textsuperscript{4793}
Who says to his parents,
“Fie on you! Do ye
Hold out the promise
To me that I
Shall be raised up,
Even though generations
Have passed before me
(Without rising again)?”
And they two seek
Allah’s aid, (and rebuke
The son): “Woe to thee!
Have Faith! For the promise
Of Allah is true.”

\textsuperscript{4792} Cf. xxix. 7 and n. 3429.

\textsuperscript{4793} A godly man often has an ungodly son, who flouts all that the father held
sacred, and looks upon his father himself as old-fashioned and unworthy of respect or
regard. The contrast in an individual family may be matched by the contrast in the passing
and the rising generations of mankind. All this happens as a passing phase in the normal
evolution of mankind, and there is nothing in this to be despondent about. What we have
to do is for the mature generations to bring up their successors in godly ways, and for
the younger generations to realise that age and experience count for something, especially
in the understanding of spiritual matters and other matters of the highest moment to man.
But he says, “This is Nothing but tales Of the ancients!”

18. Such are they against whom
The word proved true Among the previous generations Of Jinns and men, that have Passed away; for they will Be (utterly) lost.

19. And to all Are (assigned) degrees According to the deeds Which they (have done), And in order that (Allah) May recompense their deeds; And no injustice will be done To them.

20. And on the Day that The Unbelievers will be Placed before the Fire, (It will be said to them): “Ye squandered your good things In the life of the world, 4794. Cf. xli. 25 and n. 4494. Each individual, each generation, and each people is responsible for its own good deeds or misdeeds. The law of actions and their fruits applies: you cannot blame one for another. The only remedy lies in seeking for Allah’s Grace and Mercy, not only for ourselves but for others in brotherly or fatherly love.

This verse is in balanced contrast to verse 16 above.

4795. There is fine grading in the Hereafter. Every deed, good or bad, is judged and weighed to the minutest degree, with its motives, intentions, results, and relevant circumstances. It is not a mere rough classification. The fruits of evil will be exactly according to the degree of evil. But, as stated in other passages (e.g., xxviii. 84), the reward of good deeds will be far beyond their merits, on account of the Mercy and unbounded Bounty of Allah.

4796. “Squandered your good things” implies (in Arabic) grabbing at them, being greedy of them, seeking them as fleeting pleasures rather than the more serious things of life, sacrificing the spiritual for the material.
And ye took your pleasure
Out of them: but to-day
Shall ye be recompensed\(^{4797}\)
With a Chastisement of humiliation:
For that ye were arrogant
On earth without just cause,
And that ye (ever) transgressed."

SECTION 3.

21. Mention (Hūd)

One of ‘Ād’s (own) brethren:\(^{4798}\)
Behold, he warned his people
Beside the winding Sand-tracts:\(^{4799}\)
But there have been Warners
Before him and after him:
"Worship ye none other
Than Allah: truly I fear
For you the Chastisement
Of a Mighty Day."

22. They said: "Hast thou come\(^{4800}\)
In order to turn us aside
From our gods? Then bring

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\(^{4797}\) They will be told: ‘You took your choice, and you must pay the price. You did wrong in a rebellious spirit, and prided yourselves on your wrong-doing, not occasionally, but of set purpose and constantly. Now you will be humbled in the dust, as a fitting punishment.’

\(^{4798}\) Cf. vii. 65. and note 1040. The point is that the Warner who was raised among the ‘Ād people—as among other peoples—was not a stranger, but one of their own brethren, even as the holy Prophet began his preaching with a call to his own brethren the Quraisḥ.

\(^{4799}\) Winding Sand-tracts: Ahqāf: see Introduction to this Sūra. The very things, which, under irrigation and with Allah’s Grace, gave them prosperity and power, were to be their undoing when they broke Allah’s Law and defied His Grace. See verses 24-26 below.

\(^{4800}\) They were too much wedded to their evil ways—to the false gods that they worshipped—to appreciate the sincere advice of the prophet of Allah. They defied him and defied Allah Who had sent him. Mockingly they challenged him to bring on the threatened punishment! For they did not believe a word of what he said.
Upon us the (calamity)
With which thou dost
Threaten us, if thou
Art telling the truth!"

23. He said: “The Knowledge
(Of when it will come)
Is only with Allah: I
Proclaim to you the mission
On which I have been sent:
But I see that ye
Are a people in ignorance!"...

24. Then, when they saw
A cloud advancing towards
Their valleys,
They said, “This cloud
Will give us rain!”
“Nay, it is the (calamity)
Ye were asking to be
Hastened!—a wind
Wherein is a Grievous Chastisement!

4801. The coming of the Punishment for evil was (and is always) certain. At what particular time it would come he could not tell. It is not for the prophet, but for Allah, to bring on the Penalty. But he saw that it was useless to appeal to them on account of the ignorance in which they were content to dwell.

4802. The Punishment came suddenly, and when they least expected it. They wanted rain, and they saw a cloud and rejoiced. Behold, it was coming towards their own tracts, winding through the hills. Their irrigation channels would be full, their fields would be green, and their season would be fruitful. But no! What is this? It is a tremendous hurricane, carrying destruction on its wings! A violent blast, with dust and sand! Its fury destroys everything in its wake! Lives lost! Fields covered with sand-hills! The morning dawns on a scene of desolation! Where were the men who boasted and defied their Lord! There are only the ruins of their houses to witness to the past!
25. "Everything will it destroy
    By the command of its Lord!"
    Then by the morning they—
    Nothing was to be seen
    But (the ruins of) their houses!
    Thus do We recompense
    Those given to sin!

26. And We had firmly established
    Them in a (prosperity and) power
    Which We have not given
    To you (ye Quraish!)
    And We had endowed them
    With (faculties of)
    Hearing, seeing, heart and intellect:
    But of no profit to them
    Were their (faculties of)
    Hearing, sight, and heart
    And intellect, when they
    Went on rejecting the Signs
    Of Allah: and they were
    (Completely) encircled
    By that which they
    Used to mock at!

4803. Here is the figure of speech known in rhetoric as aposiopesis, to heighten the effect of the suddenness and completeness of the calamity. In the Arabic text, the verb asbahū, in the third person plural, leads us to expect that we shall be told what they were doing in the morning. But no! They had been wiped out, and any small remnant had fled (see n. 1040 to vii. 65). Nothing was to be seen but the ruins of their houses.

4804. The ‘Ad and their successors the Thamūd were more richly endowed with the faculties of the arts, sciences, and culture than ever were the Quraish before Islam. "Hearing and seeing" refer to the experimental faculties; the word "heart" in Arabic includes intellect, or the rational faculties, as well as the instruments of feeling and emotion, the aesthetic faculties. The Second ‘Ad, or Thamūd, have left interesting traces of their architecture in the country round the Hijr: see n. 1043 to vii. 73, and notes 2002-2003 to xv. 80-82.

4805. The highest talents and faculties of this world are useless in the next world if we reject the laws of Allah and thus become outlaws in the Hereafter.

4806. See n. 4770 to xlv. 33. They used to mock at Allah’s Signs, but those were the very things which hemmed them in, and showed that they had more power and effectiveness than anything else.
27. We destroyed aforetime Towns round about you; And We have shown The Signs in various ways, That they may turn (to Us).

28. Why then was no help Forthcoming to them from those Whom they worshipped as gods, Besides Allah, as a means Of access (to Allah)? Nay, They left them in the lurch: But that was their Falsehood and their invention.

29. Behold, We turned Towards thee a company Of Jinns (quietly) listening To the Qur-an: when they Stood in the presence Thereof, they said, “Listen In silence!” When the (reading) Was finished, they returned To their people, to warn them.

30. They said, “O our people! We have heard a Book Revealed after Moses,

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4807. In Arabian history and tradition alone, to say nothing of Allah’s Signs elsewhere, sin inevitably suffered its Punishment, and in various ways. Would not the later people take warning?

4808. The false things that they worshipped were figments of their imagination. If they had had any existence in fact, it was not of the kind they imagined.

4809. A company of Jinns. Nafar (company) may mean a group of from three to ten persons. For Jinns, see n. 929 to vi. 100. They listened to the reading of the Qur-an with great respect. The next verse shows that they had heard of the Jewish religion, but they were impressed with the Message of Islam, and they seem to have gone back to their people to share the Good News with them.
Confirming what came
Before it: it guides
To the Truth and
To a Straight Path.

31. “O our people, hearken
To the one who invites (You) to Allah, and believe
In him: He will forgive You your faults,
And deliver you from A Chastisement Grievous.

32. “If any does not hearken
To the one who invites (Us) to Allah, he cannot Escape in the earth,
And no protectors can he have Besides Allah: such Are in manifest error.”

33. See they not that Allah, Who created the heavens
And the earth, and never Wearied with their creation, Is able to give life To the dead? Yea, verily He has power over all things.

4810. The one who invites all to Allah is the holy Prophet. He invites us to Allah: if we believe in Allah and His Prophet, Allah will forgive us our sins on our repentance and amendment of our lives, and save us the Penalty of the future life.

4811. If a person refuses to believe the Truth, or opposes it, it has not the least effect on Allah’s holy Plan, which will go on to its completion; but it will deprive him of Grace and of any protection whatever; he will wander about as an outlaw in manifest helplessness.

4812. Cf. ii. 255 (Verse of the Throne): “His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them.” He Whose power is constant and unwearied in creating and preserving all things in heaven and earth can surely give life to the dead at the Resurrection.
34. And on the Day that

The Unbelievers will be

Placed before the Fire,

(They will be asked,)

"Is this not the Truth?"

They will say, "Yea,

By our Lord"

(He will say:)

"Then taste ye

The Chastisement, for that ye

Went to deny (Truth)!"

35. Therefore patiently persevere,

As did (all) messengers

Of firm resolution;

And be in no haste

About the (Unbelievers). On the

Day

That they see the (Punishment)

Promised them, (it will be)

As if they had not

Tarried more than an hour

In a single day. (Thine

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4813. Cf. xlvi. 20, where the argument was closed about the undutiful son of a good father. After that the example of the 'Ad and of the believing Jinns was cited, and now is closed that argument in similar terms.

4814. The Truth which they denied is now all too clear to them. They are out of the Light of Truth, out of the Light of Allah's Countenance. And that in itself is a terrible Penalty.

4815. All good work proceeds in its own good time. We should never be impatient either about its success or about the punishment which is bound to come for those who oppose it or wish to suppress it. The inevitable punishment is spoken of as the Punishment promised. It will come so soon and so suddenly that it will appear as if there was not the delay of a single hour in a single day! Time is a great factor in our affairs in this world, but it hardly counts in the next world.
4816. The Preacher’s duty is to proclaim the Message in unmistakable terms. If any human beings come in the way, it will be to their own destruction; but none but rebellious transgressor will be punished. There is always hope and forgiveness for repentance and amendment.