



CHAPTER 18

Al-Kahf: The Cave

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 12 sections; 110 verses)

This chapter deals entirely with the Christian religion and the Christian nations, and that is the reason for giving it the name *The Cave*. The distinctive characteristic of Christianity is its institution of monkery, which required for its practice such corners of solitude as caves. The story of the *Dwellers of the Cave* is in fact the story of the Christian religion, whose first condition was one of dwelling in caves in perfect seclusion, but whose last condition is that of material engagements in trade and industry, hinted at in the word *raqim* or *inscription*; see v. 9; 9a.

The last chapter is brought to a close by pointing out the error of attributing a son to the Divine Being, while that very doctrine is denounced at the commencement of this chapter, thereby clearly establishing the connection of the two. The chapter opens with a plain denunciation of the Christian doctrine of the sonship of Jesus, and then refers to the earthly "embellishments" which hinder the Christian nations from accepting the truth; yet, we are told, it was their ancestors who cut off all worldly connections for the sake of their religion. The second and the third sections deal with a certain story of Christian youths who sought refuge in a cave, but the story has evidently beneath it a deeper significance, and contains prophetic reference to the later history of Christianity itself. The fourth section shows that true guidance is now offered in the Holy Qur'an. The fifth illustrates in a parable that the Christians will reject the truth at first because of their greater power and wealth. The next two sections deal with the bringing of the guilty to judgment and their ultimate helplessness, while the eighth indicates how warning is disregarded when first given. The ninth and tenth sections take us back to the story of Moses, whose travels in search of knowledge make him discover a man of God superior in knowledge to himself. If the story be taken as speaking of the *Mi'rāj*, or Ascension, of Moses, it may be interpreted as affording a contrast between the narrow limits of the Mosaic dispensation and the universal nature and the high ideals of the Islamic dispensation. The eleventh section speaks of Darius I, the two-horned one of Daniel's vision, and of his great efforts against two tribes known as Gog and Magog, the real object being a prophetic allusion to their latter-day representatives. The last section of the chapter again refers, not only to the basic doctrine of the Christian religion, but also to the great ingenuity in manufactures of the nations professing that religion, whose *effort goes astray in this world's life*, and thus draws a very true picture of the present condition of the Christian nations.

The whole of this chapter was revealed at Makkah, and, as shown in the introductory note on ch. 17, is an early Makkan revelation.

SECTION 1: A Warning to the Christians

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent,
the Merciful.

1 Praise be to Allāh! Who revealed
the Book to His servant, and allowed
not therein any crookedness,^a

2 Rightly directing,^a to give warn-
ing of severe punishment from Him
and to give good news to the believers
who do good that theirs is a goodly
reward,

3 Staying in it for ever;

4 And to warn those who say:
Allāh has taken to Himself a son.

5 They have no knowledge of it,
nor had their fathers. Grievous is the
word that comes out of their mouths.
They speak nothing but a lie.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ
الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَجًا ۝

قِيمًا لِّيُنذِرَ بَأْسًا شَدِيدًا لِمَنْ كَفَرَ
وَيُبَشِّرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ
الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا ۝

مَا كَثُرَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا ۝

وَيُنذِرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا ۝

مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلَا لِآبَائِهِمْ ۝
كَبُرَتْ كَلِمَةً تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ
إِنْ يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا ۝

1a. In connection with this chapter, the Holy Prophet is reported to have said: He who remembers the first ten verses of the chapter entitled the "Cave" is protected from the tribulation of Dajjāl (Antichrist) (Ms. 6:42). Shi'bah mentions the last ten verses of *The Cave* instead of the first ten (AD. 36:12).

Now in the first and the last sections of this chapter the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus is condemned. In the first section a warning is given to those who say *Allāh has taken to Himself a son* (v. 4), in the last two to those who *take My servants to be friends besides Me* (v. 102), and this doctrine, the doctrine of sonship and of the divinity of a servant of God, is the basic doctrine of the Christian religion. Moreover, in the concluding ten verses, a true description of the occupation of Christian nations is given in the words *whose effort goes astray in this world's life* (v. 104). The Holy Qur'ān does not speak of the appearance of Dajjāl, or Antichrist, anywhere but the Prophet's saying quoted above plainly shows that the Dajjāl of the Ḥadīth is the same as the upholders of the erroneous Christian doctrine of the sonship and divinity of Jesus Christ. Christianity, in its present form, being opposed to the true teachings of Christ, is thus the only Antichrist known to the Qur'ān. It may be added that Dajjāl signifies *one who conceals the truth with falsehood, or a liar or a great deceiver* (LL).

2a. The Qur'ān is here described as possessing two qualifications. The first refers to its own perfection, *there is no crookedness in it*; and the second speaks of it as a book suited to make others perfect, for it is called *qayyim*, as meaning one that rightly directs others. Or, it is called *qayyim*, meaning *maintainer*, as regulating the affairs of men or as maintaining the spiritual truth, which indeed would have been entirely lost to the world but for its being guarded by the Holy Qur'ān.

6 Then maybe thou wilt kill thyself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they believe not in this announcement.^a

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَآخِئَةً نَّفْسَكَ عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ
إِنْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا

7 Surely We have made whatever is on the earth an embellishment for it, so that We may try which of them is best in works.

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَىٰ الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَّهَا
لِنَبْلُوَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

8 And We shall surely make what is on it dust, without herbage.^a

وَإِنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا

9 Or, thinkest thou that the companions of the Cave and the Inscription were of Our wonderful signs?^a

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ
وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا

6a. This verse gives us an insight into the anxiety which the Holy Prophet had on account of a fallen humanity, an anxiety so great that he is spoken of here as *almost killing himself with grief*. His was a life of absolute devotion to the cause of humanity, his only concern being that man should rise to the true dignity for which God had made him. This anxiety was not only for those who were directly addressed by him, but, as the context shows, it was as deep for another people, who attributed a son to the Divine Being, and whom outward finery was to mislead to such an extent as to make them strangers to spiritual truth. Reading the next verse along with this, no doubt is left that the Prophet was shown the earthly embellishments which are so great a trial for Christendom today.

The word *ḥadīth* means *new* or *recent*, and hence is applied to a *narration* or *announcement* which is new or which gives some new information. It here refers to the Qur'ān.

8a. Vv. 7 and 8 direct man's attention to the fact that the finery of this life does not last forever. A dweller in the desert of Arabia, with no sight before his eyes but that of the sands of the desert and bare, rugged hills, could not imagine the earth being embellished. The picture drawn here is evidently of the beautiful cities of the modern age, with all their attractions and luxuries, which so engross men that they neither pay attention to the preaching of truth nor to the pursuit of righteousness. Yet where there is growth there is decay, and those who indulge in luxuries do not escape ruin; it is their ruin that is indicated in the words *dust, without herbage*. We have already seen how clearly the Qur'ān states that a severe punishment would overtake the world and destroy populous towns: *There is not a town but We will destroy it before the day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement* (17:58); see 17:58a. The earth will be first beautified to its utmost, we are told here, and then laid waste, by man's own hands, lofty buildings being reduced to dust and beautiful gardens being turned into bare earth without any herbage on it. All prophecies made known through the righteous servants of God, the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ, and then through the Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth*, point to world-wide conflicts in the latter days, of nation rising against nation, of great calamities, of destruction of cities on a vast scale. All these things this generation has seen with its own eyes. Science first embellished the earth and science is now turning it into a waste, by its atom bombs and other diabolic inventions. The powerful hand of God is thus seen clearly working in the history of the world.

9a. *Kahf* signifies a *cave* as well as a *place of refuge*, and *raqīm* means an *inscription* or a *tablet with a writing upon it*. Now *The Cave*, as I have already stated, stands for

10 When the youths sought refuge in the Cave, they said: Our Lord, grant us mercy from Thyself, and provide for us a right course in our affair.

إِذْ أَوْى الْقُتَيْبَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا
 آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا
 مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا ﴿١٠﴾

11 So We prevented them from hearing in the Cave for a number of years,^a

فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ
 سِنِينَ عَدَدًا ﴿١١﴾

12 Then We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties was best able to calculate the time for which they remained.^a

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْجَرْبَيْنِ
 أَحْصَى لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمْدًا ﴿١٢﴾

SECTION 2: The Dwellers in the Cave

13 We relate to thee their story with truth. Surely they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance.^a

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ ط
 إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدَّوْنَهُمْ هُدًى ﴿١٣﴾

that peculiar aspect of the Christian religion which finds manifestation in its institution of monkey, this being the distinctive characteristic which it assumed soon after its birth. But what about the Inscription? This word contains a prophetic reference to another aspect of the Christian religion, quite opposed to its first aspect of growth in the *Cave*. *Inscription* (or Advertisement) is, in fact, as prominent a feature of the business activities of the Christian nations of today as the *Cave* was a feature of their religious activities in the early days. The Holy Qur'ān seems to have chosen the epithets to designate the Christian nations by thus indicating their most prominent characteristics in their early and their latter days. The first and the last conditions of Christianity thus seem to be hinted at in the *Cave* and the *Inscription* respectively, *a religion of monkey turned into a religion of business*. As for the story of the dwellers in the *Cave*, see 13a.

11a. The words *ḡarabnā 'alā ādhān-i-him* are explained as *mana'nā hum al-sam'a*, i.e., *we prevented them from hearing*. This is Dk's explanation, and it is nearest the original sense of the words, for one significance of *ḡaraba* is *ṣadda*, i.e., *he prevented* (T, LL). The *preventing from hearing* is then understood to be equivalent to *causing to sleep*, but the original meaning is favoured by the context, the significance being that these people remained cut off from the rest of the world for a number of years. Thus the Holy Qur'ān neither supports the story of these men remaining in the cave for hundreds of years, nor of their being actually in a condition of continuous sleep all this while.

12a. The *raising them up* might signify *raising them up from sleep*, as also *raising them up into a condition of activity*, after their remaining cut off from the world, as stated in the previous verse. What it means with reference to the story itself, or with reference to the history of Christianity, is explained in the second and the third sections.

13a. The memorable story of the "seven sleepers", with whom *the companions of the Cave and the Inscription* are identified, is a story of the reign of the Emperor Decius. Seven noble youths of Ephesus, it is said, took refuge in a cave to escape Decius' persecution. But the Emperor, eventually learning this, ordered the entrance to the cave to be firmly secured with a pile of large stones. It is stated that the youths fell asleep as soon as they were shut up

14 And We strengthened their hearts when they stood up and said: وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا

in the cave, and awoke 187 years after this in the reign of Theodosius, when the stones were removed by the slaves of one Adollius to supply building material for some edifice. They then sent one of their number, Jamblicus, to bring food for them from the city, but he was taken to the judge on presenting a coin of the reign of Decius, and thus the youths were discovered. It is related that the Emperor himself saw their radiant faces. This is the account given by Gibbon. But some state that these youths remained in that condition for 375 years.

That there may be a modicum of truth underlying this story is not only most probable, but almost certain, for the story could not otherwise have found such wide prevalence. The story as narrated in the Qur'ān does not credit the unnatural incidents of the above account. It only speaks of some men having taken refuge in a dark cave on account of a religious persecution; where and when it does not state. That is all that is stated in this section of the story, and apparently it seems to be continued in the third, while, according to another view, the third section may be a prophetic description of the later growth of Christianity itself. Taking, however, the first view, what is related in the third section is that, after they had rested for a part of a day, they made arrangements to get their food from outside, and remained in this condition for "a number of years" (v. 11), but were subsequently discovered, and an edifice being built at the mouth of the cave caused their death. It mentions conjectures as to their number and the number of years they remained in the cave, but does not go beyond saying that there were *some* men who remained in the cave for *some* years.

There is another very plausible suggestion that the persons referred to here were Joseph of Arimathaea and some other early Christians, their place of refuge being Glastonbury in England, which on account of its northern position well answers the description of the Cave as given in the Qur'ān. According to William of Malmesbury, Joseph of Arimathaea "was sent to Britain by St. Philip, and having received a small island in Somersetshire, there constructed with twisted twigs the first Christian church in Britain, afterwards to become the abbey of Glastonbury. The legend says that his staff planted in the ground became a thorn, flowering twice a year" (En. Br., Art. "Joseph of Arimathaea"). In the tenth edition of En. Br. Joseph of Arimathaea is said to have "wandered into Britain in the year 63". "The Glastonbury thorn, which is said to be a distinct variety, was regularly visited by pilgrims until it was destroyed about the Reformation times." Again we find in the En. Br. under Glastonbury: "According to the legends which grew up under the care of the monks, the first church of Glastonbury was a little wattled building erected by Joseph of Arimathaea as the leader of the twelve apostles sent over to Britain from Gaul by St. Philip". The legends of the "Holy Grail" again connect the name of Joseph of Arimathaea with Britain. According to one of these the Grail, which was the dish of the last supper, was confined to the care of Joseph, while according to another, "the Grail is said to have followed Joseph to Britain" (En. Br., Art. "Grail"). All these may be legends, but they are certainly not without an undercurrent of truth. The connection of the name of Joseph of Arimathaea with Britain is the strong central fact underlying them all. What makes it still more significant is the fact that Joseph of Arimathaea, who appears very prominently in the closing scenes of the Gospels, so much so that one Gospel looks upon him as a disciple of Jesus, altogether disappears from the history of Christianity as imaged in the propagandic efforts of the apostles. Does this not show that he had changed the scene of his exertions? May then Joseph of Arimathaea and his companions be taken as being referred to in the story of the *Companions of the Cave and the Inscription*? If an answer could be found in the affirmative, then England could definitely be said to be the *Cave* referred to in the Holy Qur'ān, and the description of the *Cave* given in v. 17 well applies to it; see 17a. But even if our answer to that question is in the negative, the story itself is not without a deeper meaning, and more statements than one show that there is a reference to the history of Christianity itself in the story.

Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth; we call upon no god beside Him, for then indeed we should utter an enormity.¹⁴

15 These our people have taken gods beside Him. Why do they not bring clear authority for them? Who is then more unjust than he who forges a lie against Allāh?

16 And when you withdraw from them and what they worship save Allāh, take refuge in the Cave; your Lord will spread forth for you of His mercy, and provide for you a profitable course in your affair.

17 And thou mightest see the sun, when it rose, decline from their Cave to the right, and when it set leave them behind on the left, while they were in a wide space thereof. This is of the signs of Allāh. He whom Allāh guides, he is on the right way; and whom He leaves in error, thou wilt not find for him a friend to guide aright.¹⁵

رَبُّنَا رَبُّ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ كُنْ تَدْعُوْا
مِنْ دُوْبِهٖ اِلٰهًا لَقَدْ قُلْنَا اِذَا شَطَطًا ۝

هَلْ اَكْبَرُ تَوْحٰدًا تَدْعُوْنَ مِنْ دُوْبِهٖ اِلٰهَةً
لَوْ لَا يَأْتُوْنَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِسُلْطٰنٍ بَيِّنٍ فَمَنْ
اَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ اِنْتَرٰى عَلَى اللّٰهِ كِذْبًا ۝

وَ اِذْ اَعْتَرٰتْهُمْ وَاٰلَهُمْ مَّا يَعْبُدُوْنَ اِلَّا اللّٰهُ
فَاَوْ اِلَى الْكُهْفِ يَنْشُرْ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِّنْ
رَّحْمَتِهٖ وَيَهْدِيْ لَكُمْ مِّنْ اَمْرِكُمْ مَّرْفَقًا ۝

وَتَرٰى الشَّمْسَ اِذَا طَلَعَتْ تَوَّارَةً مِّنْ
كُهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِيْنِ وَاِذَا غَرَبَتْ
تَقَرَّبَتْ ذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ وَهِيَ فِيْ سُوْبَةٍ
مِّنْهُ ۝ ذٰلِكَ مِنْ اٰيٰتِ اللّٰهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ يَهْتَدُوْنَ
اللّٰهُ هُوَ الْهُدٰى وَمَنْ يَضِلْ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ
لَهُ وَلِيًّا مُّرْسِدًا ۝

SECTION 3: The Dwellers in the Cave

18 And thou mightest think them awake while they were asleep, and We turned them about to the right and to the left, with their dog outstretching its paws at the entrance. If

وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ اِنْفَاظًا وَّهُمْ رُقُوْدٌ ۝ وَ
نُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِيْنِ وَ ذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ ۝
وَ كَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ ذِرَاعَيْهِ بِالْوَصِيْدِ ۝

14a. This is to show that the early followers of Christianity were Unitarians.

17a. The verse does not speak of any miraculous change in the sun's course; it does not speak of any change at all. It simply describes the position of the cave, which was so situated that it did not admit sunshine. This could easily happen in a cave with its mouth to the north, situated in the northern hemisphere and above the tropic of cancer. In fact, the description applies to any country in the northern hemisphere north of the tropic of cancer. The whole of Europe thus, in one sense, answers the description of the cave. It is a fact that Christianity spread first in Europe.

thou didst look at them, thou wouldst turn back from them in flight, and thou wouldst be filled with awe because of them.^a

19 And thus did We rouse them that they might question each other. A speaker from among them said: How long have you tarried? They said: We have tarried for a day or a part of a day. (Others) said: Your Lord knows best how long you have tarried.^a Now send one of you with this silver (coin) of yours to the city, then let him see what food is purest, and bring you provision from it, and let him behave with gentleness, and not make your case known to anyone.^b

لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا
وَلَمَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعبًا ﴿١٨﴾

وَكَذَلِكَ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِيَنَّاسَآءَ لَوَا بَيْنَهُمْ طَائِلًا
قَائِلًا مِنْهُمْ كَمَا لَيِّنْتُمْ طَائِلُوا لَيْنَانَا يَوْمًا
أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ طَائِلُوا رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَيِّنْتُمْ
فَابْعَثُوا أَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرِقِكُمْ هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ
فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهَا أَزْكَى طَعَامًا فَلْيَأْتِكُمْ
بِرِزْقٍ مِنْهُ وَلْيَتَلَطَّفْ وَلَا يُشْعِرَتِ
بِكُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿١٩﴾

18a. What is related in this section is clearly applicable to the story of the seven sleepers, as also to the later history of Christianity. Taking the first view, the meaning is that the youths, who fled for fear of persecution and betook themselves to a cave, slept for some time with a dog at the door of the cave. The whole scene was rather awe-inspiring; a dark cave, in some distant and uninhabited part of the country, with some men sleeping in it and a dog at the door, would have inspired awe into the heart of a casual looker-on. Applied to the history of Christianity the statement is equally true. In this case it should be borne in mind that *ruqūd* ("asleep") also means *inactive*, or *stagnant*. Thus *raqada* means *qa'ada*, *ta'akhhara*, i.e., *he abstained or held back from the affair* (T, LL). *Raqadati-l-sūqu* is equivalent to *kasadat*, i.e., *the market became stagnant or dull with respect to traffic* (LL), and *ruqūd* is the infinitive noun of *raqada*. Similarly *aiqāz* ("awake") is plural of *yaqīz*, which means a man *vigilant, wary, in a state of caution, or a man having his attention much roused* (LL). *Tayaqqaza-li-l-amr* means *tanabbaha*, i.e., *he had his attention roused to the affair* (T). The *turning about to the right and to the left*, which signifies an uneasy condition while sleeping, may be used as expressing the activities of a man or a nation. Thus there may be a reference here to the lethargy in which the Christian nations remained for a long time, and to their subsequent going about in the world *to the right and to the left*, i.e., spreading in all directions. It may also be noted that Europeans are generally fond of dogs.

19a. The question and the answer may refer either to the time for which the youths slept or to the centuries of inactivity or tardiness of the Christian nations. A day of a thousand years is spoken of in the Holy Qur'an on more occasions than one (see 22:47, etc.), and therefore the word *day*, applied to the history of a nation, may signify a thousand years.

19b. After having been refreshed with sleep, which might have been brought on by the fatigue of the journey, they thought of procuring food for themselves in that solitary cave and sent one of them to the city, and impressed on him that he should be gentle and should not give an inkling of their whereabouts to anyone. In reference to the history of Christianity, the passage may be said to speak of the commercial activities of the Christian nations.

20 For if they prevail against you, they would stone you to death or force you back to their religion, and then you would never succeed.

إِنَّهُمْ إِنْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ يَرْجُمُوكُمْ أَوْ يُعِيدُوكُمْ فِي مِلَّتِهِمْ وَلَنْ تُفْلِحُوا إِذًا أَبَدًا ﴿٢٠﴾

21 And thus did We make (men) to get knowledge of them,^a that they might know that Allāh's promise is true and that the Hour — there is no doubt about it.^b When they disputed among themselves about their affair and said: Erect an edifice over them.^c Their Lord knows best about them. Those who prevailed in their affair said: We shall certainly build a place of worship over them.^d

وَكَذَلِكَ أَعْتَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَا تَرْتَابُ فِيهَا إِذْ يَتَنَزَّلُ عَنَّا بِإِذْنِنَا رَبُّهُمْ فَقَالُوا ابْنُوا عَلَيْهِم بُيُوتًا وَرَبُّهُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِهِمْ ط قَالَ الَّذِينَ عَلِمُوا عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِمْ لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِم مَّسْجِدًا ﴿٢١﴾

22 (Some) say: (They were) three, the fourth of them their dog; and (others) say: Five, the sixth of them their dog, making conjectures about the unseen. And (others) say: Seven, and the eighth of them their dog. Say: My Lord best knows their number — none knows them but a few. So contend not in their matter but with an outward contention, and

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَّا بَعْضَهُمُ كَلْبُهُمْ وَ يَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَكُنَّا مِنْهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ ط قُلْ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعَدَّتِهِمْ مَا يَعْلَمُهُمُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ ؕ فَلَا تُمَارَ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَاهِرًا وَلَا تَسْتَفْتِ فِيهِمْ

21a. That is, they would have remained hidden had it not been for the necessities of life, which they had still to procure from the city. It was their going out to purchase food that brought them to the knowledge of the outside world. It is not stated how long they continued in this state: they may have passed some days or months or years, but their daily going out at last made their hiding-place known to others. Comparing this with v. 11, however, we may say that they passed several years in this condition.

21b. The result of their becoming known is described in words which show that they were put to death, because the promise of Allāh as to a future state of life is fully realized only after death.

21c. These words show how their death was brought about: it was by closing the mouth of the cave. This is what is meant by the erection of an edifice over them. The words may also signify the erection of a monument.

21d. *The masjid*, or the *mosque*, is the house of worship of the Muslims in particular, but it may mean any house of worship. The people spoken of here are those *who prevailed in their affair*. This is a later incident, when Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire, and the reference here seems to be to the saint-worship which prevailed in Christianity.

question not any of them concerning them.^a

مِّنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ۖ

SECTION 4: The Qur'ān as a Guidance

23 And say not of anything: I will do that tomorrow,^a

وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا ۚ

24 Unless Allāh please. And remember thy Lord when thou forgettest and say: Maybe my Lord will guide me to a nearer course to the right than this.^a

إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَادْكُرْ رَبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ
وَقُلْ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَهْدِيَنِّي رَبِّي لِأَقْرَبَ
مِنْ هَٰذَا سَبِيلًا ۝۲۴

25 And they remained in their cave three hundred years, and they add nine.^a

وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ
وَأَزْدًا دُونَ سَعَا ۝۲۵

22a. This verse and v. 25, coming as they do after the story is finished, show that these are only conjectures of the people with regard to them. Their number and the number of years during which they remained in the cave are both matters which are said to be only known to Allāh. I'Ab is, however, of opinion that the words condemning the first two as conjectures show that the last-mentioned number, i.e., seven, is correct.

Who are the people referred to in the concluding words, *any of them?* According to II, the people of the Book, or the Christians, are referred to here, though they are not expressly mentioned in what has gone before. It is clear from this that it is really the history of Christianity that is dealt with in the story of the Companions of the Cave. V. 25, which again speaks of the same people who are spoken of here, makes it clear that it is the history of Christianity that is really aimed at.

23a. Though the words are general, there seems to be a special prophetic reference to the Prophet's Flight and his taking refuge in a cave. He had entirely to trust in Allāh, Who was to bring it about as He thought best for him.

24a. The meaning is that the difficulties which had to be experienced by the dwellers in the cave would be removed from the Prophet's way. He had to pass only three days in the cave, and though a powerful enemy exerted itself to its utmost, his hiding-place at only a distance of three miles from the city, whither food was conveyed to him, could not be discovered. Or, in *the nearer course* there is a reference to the unprecedented triumph of Islām, which spread over the whole of Arabia within twenty-three years, and spread from Spain in the west to China in the east within a century, whereas Christianity remained in a state of subjection in its birth-place for three hundred years, as stated in the verse that follows.

25a. Commentators consider this verse as being conjoined to v. 22 with the words *they say* as being understood. But as shown in 22a, the history of Christianity, which runs like an undercurrent in the story of the Companions of the Cave, finds a clear expression now. There is no tradition that the Companions of the Cave remained in the Cave for three hundred years, but Christianity itself remained in a Cave for full three hundred years. It is a fact that Christianity rose to power with the conversion of Constantine, and at the same time it lost its purity with the formulation of the doctrine of

26 Say: Allāh knows best how long they remained. His is the unseen of the heavens and the earth. How clear His sight and His hearing! There is no guardian for them beside Him, and He associates none in His judgment.^a

قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثُوا ۗ لَهُ غَيْبُ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ أَبْصِرْ بِهِ وَأَسْمِعْ
مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا يُشْرِكُ
فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدًا ۝

27 And recite that which has been revealed to thee of the Book of thy Lord. There is none who can alter His words.^a And thou wilt find no refuge beside Him.

وَ أَنْزَلْ مَا أَوْحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابِ رَبِّكَ
لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ ۗ وَ كَنْ تَجِدَ مِنْ
دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَدًا ۝

28 And keep thyself with those who call on their Lord morning and evening desiring His goodwill, and let not thine eyes pass from them, desiring the beauties of this world's life. And follow not him whose heart We have made unmindful of Our remembrance, and he follows his low desires and his case exceeds due bounds.

وَ اصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ
رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ
وَجْهَهُ ۗ وَلَا تَقْدُ عَيْنَكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ
زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَلَا تَطِعْ مَنْ
أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَ اتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ
وَ كَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرْطًا ۝

29 And say: The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve. Surely We have prepared for the

وَ قُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۚ فَمَنْ شَاءَ
فَلْيُؤْمَرْ ۚ وَ مَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ ۗ لَآ إِلَهَ
أَعَدَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا ۗ أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ

the Trinity, which was promulgated in 325 A.D. It is, moreover, now almost agreed that Jesus Christ was born five or six years before the reputed date of his birth. Bishop Barnes says in *The Rise of Christianity* that he may have been born in 6–5 B.C. So if he began his ministry at the age of thirty, the Christian religion may be said to have been born at about 25 A.D., and thus exactly after three hundred years it lost its purity by the promulgation of the Trinitarian doctrine, emerging at the same time as a State religion. Thus it remained in the Cave for three hundred years.

But what does this, the addition of nine years, mean? To reduce solar years to lunar years, three years have to be added to every hundred years, and to the three centuries another nine years are thus added. It is due to this computation that nine years are spoken of as being *added*.

26a. *Abşir bi-hi wa asmi'* means *mā abşara wa asma'a*, or *what a sight He has and what a hearing!* The reference here is to the prophecies of the ultimate triumph of the Prophet and Islām.

27a. By *kalimāt* ("words") are meant here *prophecies*, because it is the prophecy of the Prophet's Flight and his final triumph over his enemies that is referred to here. These prophecies, it is claimed, cannot be altered by men, and they must come to pass, however great the opposing forces.

iniquitous a Fire, an enclosure of which will encompass them. And if they cry for water, they are given water like molten brass, scalding their faces.^a Evil the drink! And ill the resting-place!

سَرَادِقُهَا طَوْرًا وَيَسْتَعِينُوا يُعَاثِرُوا بِمَاءٍ
كَالْمُهْلِ يَشْوِي الْوُجُوهُ يَسُّ الشَّرَابُ
وَسَاءَتْ مُرْتَفَقًا ﴿١٥﴾

30 As for those who believe and do good, We waste not the reward of him who does a good work.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا ﴿١٦﴾

31 These it is for whom are Gardens of perpetuity wherein flow rivers; they are adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they wear green robes of fine silk and thick brocade, reclining therein on raised couches.^a Excellent the recompense! And goodly the resting-place!

أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ
تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ
مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَيَلْبَسُونَ ثِيَابًا خُضْرًا
مِنْ سُندُسٍ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٍ مُتَّكِينَ
فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ نَعْمَ الشَّرَابُ ط
وَحَسَنَتْ مُرْتَفَقًا ﴿١٧﴾

SECTION 5: A Parable

32 And set forth to them the parable of two men — for one of them We made two gardens of grapevines, and We surrounded them with date-palms, and between them We made corn-fields.^a

وَاصْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا سَرَجَلَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا
لِاحْدَاهِمَا جَنَّاتَيْنِ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَحَفَافًا
بَيْنَهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زُرْعًا ط

29a. They refused the water of spiritual life in this life, and so they will have no water to quench their thirst in the life after death.

31a. It is after these things that men hanker in this life, but the ornaments and robes of this life are transitory. The righteous, who in this life desire and struggle for only spiritual ornaments and moral beauty, find these visible in the after-life. It should, however, be borne in mind that these prophecies were in one sense brought to fulfilment in this very life. The Arabs, whose only wealth consisted of their camels and horses, and whose clothes were made of skins or cloth of rough textures, found the treasures of Rome and Persia laid at their feet, and the bracelets of gold and the silk brocade interwoven with gold, which they had never seen before, were now brought to them in abundance, while the gardens of Mesopotamia and Persia were given to them for a permanent heritage.

32a. The parable — it is clearly called a parable and is not at all a story — set forth here is undoubtedly a parable to illustrate the condition of the Christian and the Muslim nations. The former received an abundance of the wealth of this life, as is indicated by the gardens of the parable, while the latter, though poorer in worldly possessions, were richer in the heavenly blessings of Allāh. The former reject the message of Truth, of

33 Both these gardens yielded their fruits, and failed not in aught thereof, and We caused a river to gush forth in their midst,

كُنَّا الْجَنَّتَيْنِ أَنْتَ أَكْلَهُمَا وَكَمْ تَظْلِمُ
مِنْهُ شَيْئًا ۖ وَفَجَّرْنَا خِلْفَهُمَا نَهْرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

34 And he had fruit. So he said to his companion, while he argued with him: I have greater wealth than thou, and am mightier in followers.

وَكَانَ لَهُ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِهِ وَهُوَ
يُحَاوِرُهُ أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

35 And he went into his garden, while he was unjust to himself. He said: I think not that this will ever perish,

وَدَخَلَ جَنَّتَهُ وَهُوَ ظَالِمٌ لِنَفْسِهِ قَالَ
مَا أَظُنُّ أَنْ تَبِيدَ هَذِهِ أَبَدًا ﴿٣٥﴾

36 And I think not the Hour will come; and even if I am returned to my Lord, I will certainly find a returning-place better than this.^a

وَمَا أَظُنُّ السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً ۖ وَلَئِنْ رُدِدْتُ
إِلَىٰ رَبِّي لِأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهَا مُنْقَلَبًا ﴿٣٦﴾

37 His companion said to him, while arguing with him: Disbelievest thou in Him Who created thee of dust, then of a small life-germ, then He made thee a perfect man?

قَالَ لَهُ صَاحِبُهُ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَكَفَرْتُ
بِالَّذِي خَلَقَكَ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ
ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ رَجُلًا ﴿٣٧﴾

38 But as for me, He, Allāh, is my Lord, and I associate none with my Lord.

لَكِنَّا هُوَ اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ﴿٣٨﴾

39 And wherefore didst thou not say, when thou enteredst thy garden: It is as Allāh has pleased — there is no power save in Allāh? If thou consider me as less than thee in wealth and children —

وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتِكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ
اللَّهُ ۖ لَاقُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ تَرَنِ أَنَا أَقَلُّ
مِنْكَ مَالًا وَوَدَّاءًا ﴿٣٩﴾

40 Then maybe my Lord will give me better than thy garden, and will send on (thine) a reckoning from heaven so that it is dust without plant:

فَعَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَنْ يُؤْتِيَنِي خَيْرًا مِمَّنْ جَنَّتِكَ
وَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْهَا حُسْبَانًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ
فَتُصْبِحُ صَوِيبًا نَّزْلِقًا ﴿٤٠﴾

which the latter are the bearers, and their vaunt is the same as that of the wealthy man in the parable: *I have greater wealth than thou, and am mightier in followers* (v. 34).

36a. By the "Hour" is meant the hour of doom which must overtake every people who reject the Truth.

41 Or its water will sink down into the ground, so that thou art unable to find it.

أَوْ يُصْبِحَ مَأْوَاهَا غَوْرًا فَكَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ
لَهُ طَلَبًا ①

42 And his fruit was destroyed; so he began to wring his hands for what he had spent on it, while it lay waste, its roofs fallen down,^a and he said: Ah me! would that I had ascribed no partners to my Lord!

وَ أَحْيَطُ بِشِمْرِهِ فَأَصْبَحَ يَقْلَبُ كَفَيْهِ
عَلَى مَا أَنْفَقَ فِيهَا وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى
عُرُوشِهَا وَيَقُولُ لِيَلَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَشْرِكْ
بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ②

43 And he had no host to help him against Allāh, nor could he defend himself.

وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ فِئَةٌ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ
اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مُنْتَصِرًا ③

44 Thus protection is only Allāh's, the True One. He is Best to reward and Best in requiting.

هُنَالِكَ الْوَلَايَةُ لِلَّهِ الْحَقِّ هُوَ خَيْرٌ
تَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ عُقْبًا ④

SECTION 6: The Guilty are brought to Judgment

45 And set forth to them the parable of the life of this world as water which We send down from the cloud, so the herbage of the earth becomes luxuriant thereby, then it becomes dry, broken into pieces which the winds scatter. And Allāh is the Holder of power over all things.

وَ اضْرِبْ لَهُمْ مَثَلًا الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَا
أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ
الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ هَشِيمًا تَذْرُوهُ الرِّيْحُ
وَ كَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُقْتَدِرًا ⑤

46 Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world; but the ever-abiding, the good works, are better with thy Lord in reward and better in hope.

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
وَ الْبَاقِيَةُ الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ
تَوَابًا وَ خَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ⑥

47 And the day when We cause the mountains to pass away, and thou seest the earth a levelled plain and We gather them together and leave none of them behind.^a

وَ يَوْمَ نُسَيِّرُ الْجِبَالَ وَ تَرَى الْأَرْضَ
بَارِزَةً وَ وَحْشَرْنَاهُمْ فَكَمْ نَعَادِرُ
مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ⑦

42a. Here we have an exact description of the havoc that is being wrought in the world before our eyes.

47a, see next page.

48 And they are brought before thy Lord in ranks. Now certainly you have come to Us as We created you at first. Nay, you thought that We had not made an appointment for you.

وَعَرِّضُوا عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ صَفًّا لَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا
كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ بَلْ نَرَاكُمْ
أَلَّنْ نَجْعَلَ لَكُمْ مَوْعِدًا ﴿٥٨﴾

49 And the book is placed, and thou seest the guilty fearing for what is in it, and they say: O woe to us! what a book is this! It leaves out neither a small thing nor a great one, but numbers them (all), and they find what they did confronting them. And thy Lord wrongs not anyone.^a

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ
مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يُوَيْلِتَنَا
مَا لَ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا
كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا ۗ وَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا
حَاضِرًا ۗ وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا ﴿٥٩﴾

SECTION 7: Their Helplessness

50 And when We said to the angels: Make submission to Adam, they submitted except Iblis. He was of the jinn, so he transgressed the commandment of his Lord.^a Will you then take him and his offspring for friends rather than Me, and they are your enemies? Evil is the exchange for the unjust.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا
إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ طَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ
أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ طَ أَذْنَبْتَنخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أُولِيَاءَ
مِنْ دُونِي ۖ وَهُمْ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ طَبِيسَ
لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا ﴿٥٠﴾

51 I made them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation. Nor could I take those who mislead for aiders.

مَا أَشْهَدْتُهُمْ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
وَلَا خَلْقَ أَنْفُسِهِمْ ۖ وَمَا كُنْتُ مَتَّخِذًا
الْمُضِلِّينَ عَضُدًا ﴿٥١﴾

52 And one day He will say: Call on those whom you considered to be

وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ نَادُوا شُرَكَاءِيَ الَّذِينَ
رَبَّيْتُمْ

47a. Making the earth a levelled plain indicates the removal of all those mighty obstacles which stood in the way of the advancement of Truth, and these are the mountains which are made to pass away; see 20:105a.

49a. This comprehensive book is the same as is spoken of in 17:13, 14: "And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. Read thy book. Thine own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against thee this day". There is not the slightest action, good or bad, which does not leave its effect behind.

50a. Iblis is one of the jinn or the evil spirits, so it is an error to take him for an angel or a good spirit. The spirit of evil is always rebellious, and it is against this that man is warned, so that he should resist every evil tendency.

My partners. So they will call on them, but they will not answer them, and We shall cause a separation between them.^a

رَعَمْتُمْ فَدَعَوْهُمْ فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَهُمْ
وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُم مَّوْبِقًا ﴿٥٠﴾

53 And the guilty will see the Fire, and know that they are about to fall into it, and they will find no escape from it.

وَسَاءَ الْمَجْرُمُونَ النَّارَ فَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ
مُؤْتَفَعُوهَا وَكَمْ يَجِدُوا عَنْهَا مَصْرِفًا ﴿٥١﴾

SECTION 8: Warning is disregarded

54 And certainly We have made distinct in this Qur'an for mankind every kind of description; and man is in most things contentious.

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِلنَّاسِ
مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ أَكْثَرَ
شَيْءٍ جَدَلًا ﴿٥٢﴾

55 And nothing prevents men from believing when the guidance comes to them, and from asking forgiveness of their Lord, but that (they wait) for the way of the ancients to overtake them, or that the chastisement should confront them.

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ
الْهُدَىٰ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ
تَأْتِيَهُمْ سُنَّةٌ الْأَوَّلِينَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ
الْعَذَابُ قُبُلًا ﴿٥٣﴾

56 And We send not messengers but as givers of good news and warning, and those who disbelieve contend with falsehood to weaken thereby the Truth, and they take My messages and the warning for a mockery.

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ
وَمُنذِرِينَ وَيُجَادِلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ وَاتَّخَذُوا
آيَاتِي وَمَا أُنزِلُوا هُزُوًا ﴿٥٤﴾

57 And who is more unjust than he who is reminded of the messages of his Lord, then he turns away from them and forgets what his hands have sent before? Surely We have placed veils over their hearts, lest they understand it, and a deafness in their ears.^a And if thou call them to the

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ
فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا وَنَسِيَ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَا
إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ
يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا ط وَإِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ

52a. *Bain* has three significances, viz., *disunion*, *union*, and *between* (LL), and *maubiq* means *perdition* or *separation*, or *fatal enmity* (T).

57a. It is when man becomes so iniquitous as to turn away from the truth and so callous as not to care for the evil that he does that a veil is placed over his heart.

guidance, they will even then never follow the right course.

58 And thy Lord is Forgiving, Full of mercy. Were He to punish them for what they earn, He would certainly hasten the chastisement for them. But for them there is an appointed time from which they will find no refuge.^a

59 And these towns — We destroyed them when they did wrong. And We have appointed a time for their destruction.^a

إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ قَلَنْ يَهْتَدُوا إِذًا أَبَدًا ۝

وَسَأُخَذُكُمْ بِالْعَقْلِ وَأُنَادِيَهُمْ لِرَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ وَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِمْ لَعَنُوا لِمَا كَفَرُوا وَكَانُوا كَافِرِينَ ۝
وَالْعَذَابَ طَبْلًا لَهُمْ مَّوْعِدًا كُنَّ يَجِدُوا
مِنْ دُونِهِ مَوْجِلًا ۝

وَتِلْكَ الْقُرَىٰ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا
وَجَعَلْنَا لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مَّوْعِدًا ۝

SECTION 9: Moses travels in Search of Knowledge

60 And when Moses said to his servant:^a I will not cease until I reach the junction of the two rivers,^b otherwise I will go on for years.^c

61 So when they reached the junction of the two (rivers), they forgot

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَلْبِهِ لَا أَسْتَأْذِنُكَ
أَبْلَغَ مَجْمَعِ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا ۝

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنِهِمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا

58a. According to Kf, the appointed time referred to is the battle of Badr. But Truth is one and the same for all ages, and we see signs of the doom of the latter-day opposition to Islām clearly approaching.

59a. The personal pronoun *their* refers to the opponents of Truth, earlier as well as later.

60a. Some reports give his name as Joshua, the son of Nūn, the man who afterwards appears so prominently in the history of Israel.

The incidents narrated in the ninth and the tenth sections may be the actual experience of Moses or this journey may simply be an Ascension of Moses, like the Ascension of the Holy Prophet, referred to in the last chapter. What is stated in the next section makes the latter view more probable.

60b. The words *Majma' al-Bahrain* have been misunderstood generally. It should be borne in mind that Moses lived in Egypt for forty years, and the junction of the two rivers is no other than the junction of the two great branches of the Nile at Khartoum. That the story of this journey of Moses is not found in the Bible or even in Rabbinical literature is no argument against it. Rabbinical literature relates things about Moses which give us strong reason to believe that such a journey was very probably undertaken by him. South of Egypt was the Kingdom of Ethiopia, whose southern boundary reached Khartoum, or the junction of the two Niles, and various accounts met with both in

60c, see next page.

their fish, and it took its way into the river, being free.^a

62 But when they had gone further, he said to this servant: Bring to us our morning meal, certainly we have found fatigue in this our journey.

63 He said: Sawest thou when we took refuge on the rock, I forgot the fish, and none but the devil made me forget to speak of it, and it took its way into the river; what a wonder!^a

64 He said: This is what we sought for. So they returned retracing their footsteps.

65 Then they found one of Our servants whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves.

فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا ۝٦٢

فَلَمَّا جَاؤُنَا قَالَ لَقَفْتُمْ أَتَيْنَا عَادًا ۝٦٣
لَقَدْ كَفَيْتَنَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا ۝٦٤

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ
فَاتَّيْتُ نِسِيَتْ الْخُوتَ زَوْمًا أُنْسِيَهُ
إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ
فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ۝٦٥

قَالَ ذَلِكُمْ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغِي ۖ فَارْتَدَّا عَلَى
أَتْرَائِهِمَا قَصَصًا ۝٦٦

فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً
مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ۝٦٧

Rabbinical and Hellenistic literature (see *Jewish Encyclopaedia*) agree that Moses went to Ethiopia. According to one of these accounts, he became king of Ethiopia by reason of his great prowess in having defeated an enemy, and married the king's widow. This is corroborated to some extent by the statement in the Bible that "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married" (Num. 12:1). Hence a journey to Khartoum, which was near the southern boundary of Ethiopia, made in search of knowledge, is most probable. The person to whom Moses went was *Khadir* (B. 3:44). Some commentators, however, do not take the words *Majma' al-Bahrain* literally, taking the meaning to be the union of the rivers of human and Divine knowledge. I would, however, suggest that if we accept this journey in the light of an Ascension, it would be an indication of the limitation of the Mosaic dispensation. Moses' going on for years until he reached the *Majma' al-Bahrain* would mean that the Mosaic dispensation would see its termination after a time, the new dispensation taking its place being one which was to be guided by a prophet who is described here as being the *Majma' al-Bahrain*, i.e., the union of the two seas of human and Divine knowledge, or one in whom the temporal and the spiritual would find their highest manifestation, such being the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

60c. *Huqub* signifies a long time, or a year or seventy years or eighty years (LL).

61a. The loss of the fish was, according to a report, to serve as a sign that the goal had been attained (B. 3:44). There is nothing either in the Holy Qur'an or in the *Hadith* to show, however, that this was a roasted fish.

63a. The taking refuge on the rock shows that they were staying at a place which was flooded by the river, and Moses' companion, when hastening for refuge, forgot to take the fish along with him. The wonder is not expressed at the fish having gone down into the river, but because he had forgotten to mention the loss to Moses.