

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*All Praises to Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful*

19<sup>th</sup> Taraweeh, Ramadan 1446 Hijri

Summary of Verses 38:1-40:85

(Sura Saad is a Makki Sura)

Sura Saad (Verses 38:1-88)

Those who are *"lost in false pride and hence, deeply in the wrong"* (38:2) end up rejecting Divine guidance and will suffer failure in this life and the Hereafter.

The Quran asks: *"How many generations before them did We destroy? In the end they cried for mercy when it was too late to be saved!"* (38:3)

An episode from Prophet Daud's (AS) life shows that even prophets were not immune from human errors. *"Have you heard the story of the two disputants who climbed the wall into his place of worship? He was alarmed as they entered but they said, 'Have no fear. We have a dispute. One of us has wronged the other. Judge equitably between us and do not be partial ... This man is my brother. He has nine and ninety ewes, and I have but one. Yet he says, 'Commit her to my care,' and is, moreover, harsh to me in speech.'* Daud said: *He has undoubtedly wronged you in demanding your single ewe to be added to his flock of ewes. Truly many are the partners in business who wrong each other, except those who believe in God and do good deeds, but how few are they ...?"* (38:21-24)

The disputants vanished as mysteriously as they had arrived. Daud (AS) suddenly realized that, through the story of the disputants, *"We had put him to test, and so he sought his Lord's forgiveness and fell down prostrating*

*and repented. We forgave him for his lapse. He shall be close to Us and in the Hereafter, he shall be well-received.” (38:24-25)*

The prophet king had committed a sin that filled him with regret and sorrow. What was his sin? The Quran does not say but some scholars opine that he listened to only one side of the story before rendering his verdict, which is not the hallmark of an impartial judge. Others make the more persuasive argument that Daud (AS) became filled with self-pride about his wisdom and status as a judge. The moment he thought of himself as the author of these qualities, instead of Allah, his merit vanished. He at once realized his hubris and became sincerely repentant, thus receiving Allah’s forgiveness. Allah knows best.

Prophet Daud’s wealth, wisdom, and influence did not save him from accountability to Allah. His only salvation lay in turning to Allah in repentance and asking Him for forgiveness. That was what he did and that was why he was promised such rich rewards. What this shows is that sincere repentance to Allah can save both prophets and ordinary mortals. Believers never despair of the mercy of Allah. What a sublime lesson this illustrates, this timeless example of humility and obedience that should animate all our actions, acknowledging that it is Allah’s Grace alone that enables us to achieve whatever success we achieve in life. (This profound truth is also stated in 11:88)

Those who take the creation of the cosmos as the product of random chance are reminded that *“Not without purpose did We create heaven and earth and all between ...” (38:27)* A sense of meaning and purpose in life, as well as belief in the Hereafter, separates believers from disbelievers. After all, if there is no Hereafter, how can we reconcile the inequities and inequalities of this world? But there is a Hereafter and Allah will not treat the good and the bad alike. He is just and will restore the balance that may appear to have

been absent in this life. The Quran rhetorically asks, *"Shall We treat those who believe and work deeds of righteousness the same as those who do mischief on earth? Shall We treat those who guard against evil the same as those who turn away from what is right?"* (38:28). The answer, obviously, is no. (Review also verse 3:191: *"... Our Lord, not for nothing have You created all this! Glory to You! Give us salvation from the chastisement of the fire."*)

Allah put Sulaiman, Daud's son, to the test, as He did prophets Ayub, Ibrahim, Ishaq, Yaqub, Ismail, al-Yasa (Elisha) and Zul-Kifl, all of whom are described as righteous and sincere in seeking Allah's mercy and forgiveness.

The story of prophet Ayub (Job) (AS) is particularly instructive. He epitomized patience in extreme adversity. Not only did he lose his wealth and family, but he was also afflicted with the most debilitating of diseases. Because of his forbearance and acceptance of Allah's decree, Allah gave him back not only what he had lost but much more: *"Commemorate Our servant Ayub. Behold he cried to his Lord: 'Shaitan has afflicted with distress and suffering.' ... We gave him back his people and doubled their number as a grace from Us ... Truly We found him full of patience and constancy ..."* (38:41-44)

An important lesson from prophet Ayub's life is that, despite the calamities he faced, he never despaired of Allah's mercy. In this regard, his life parallels prophet Yusuf's life even though the nature of the calamities the two prophets faced were different.

Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) was chosen to receive the Quran and explain the essence of Tawhid to his people, the idea that there is no God but Allah, the One and the Supreme, to Whom believers can, in their own ways, take a Straight Path. The Sura concludes, *"Say, 'For this, I ask no recompense from*

*you. Nor do I pretend to be what I am not. This is but an admonition to humankind, and you shall before long know its truth.” (38:86-88)*

(Sura Zumar is a Makki Sura)

Sura Az-Zumar (The Throngs) (Verses 39:1-31)

The Sura reiterates the evidence of Allah’s existence and His Oneness in nature’s manifestations. He alone determines our fate and it is to Him that we are accountable.

Those who take protectors other than Allah say, *“We only serve them so that they may bring us nearer to Allah!”* (39:3) How deluded they are!

It is easy for us to point fingers at people who worship idols and feel smug and superior. But among believers are also those who rely on saints to bring them closer to the Creator. An even more insidious form of shirk is to pin hope on wealth, power, or knowledge that increasingly includes artificial intelligence, as a means of salvation. We must be constantly vigilant against such dangerous delusions.

The wonder of human creation is suggested in the verse: *“... He creates you in the wombs of your mothers in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness ...”* (39:6)

(The reference to human embryology referred to in this verse - along with references in verses (22:5), (23:13-14) and (32.9) - shows how the science of modern embryology offers a new understanding of the wondrous phenomenon revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) over 14 centuries ago!)

Gratitude is the hallmark of a believer. *“... If you are grateful, He is pleased with you. No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another. In the end, to your Lord is your return when He will tell you the truth of all that you did in this life, for He knows well what is in (peoples’) hearts.”* (39:7)

The Quran asks, "... *Can he who spends the nights in adoration of Allah, prostrating and standing, ever mindful of the life to come, and hoping for the mercy of the Sustainer, be like him who sleeps through the night? Say: 'Are those who know the same as those who are ignorant?' It is those who are endowed with understanding that receives admonition.*" (39:9)

(The hours of the night (*Qiyamul Lail*) are a sacred time for reflection and devotion to Allah. Particularly in the month of Ramadan, these hours take on heightened spiritual significance.)

Who are the successful ones? "*They are the ones who avoid evil and fall not into its worship and turn to Allah in repentance. Give good news to My servants who listen to what is said to them and follow the best meaning in it. They are the ones whom Allah has guided, and they are the ones endowed with understanding.*" (39:17-18)

(The exhortation to follow the 'best meaning' also repeats in (39:55). Also note the sublime circular nature of 'understanding' invoked in verses (39:9) and (39:18). If we strive to understand Allah's Words, He will admonish and warn us if we are tempted to go astray. And when our hearts are suffused with understanding the Divine Word, Allah will guide us to the Straight Path. To be in this virtuous loop is one of the aspirations of every believer!)

Those successful in the sight of Allah are blessed in that "*Allah will remove even the worst of their deeds and give them their reward according to the best of what they have done.*" (39:35)

(Allah's infinite generosity - to reward believers according to the best of their deeds - is also stated in 24:38)

The question of intercession is clarified in verse (39:44): "*Say, 'To Allah belongs exclusively the right to grant intercession. To Him belongs the*

*dominion of the heavens and the earth. In the end, it is to Him that you shall be brought back.”*

We learn that no one can intercede with Allah except 1) by Allah’s permission and 2) those who have prepared themselves for Allah’s acceptance through repentance. (Intercession is also referenced in verses (2:255), (10:3), (20:109), (21:28) and (53:26)).

There is hope for everyone: *“Say: ‘O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the mercy of Allah, for Allah forgives all sins, for He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’ Turn to your Lord in repentance and surrender yourself to Him before the penalty comes to you ...”* (39:53-54)

(Despairing of the mercy of Allah is a sign of disbelief, as also stated in (12:87). Believers are always hopeful of forgiveness and redemption through sincere repentance to Allah. Believers never forget that the deeper the grief, the closer is Allah, and that those who contemplate, understand and practice Allah’s Words receive Allah’s admonition and guidance to remain on the Straight Path. Some Muslims suffer from an unhealthy level of guilt and thus suffer from too little hope in Allah. They think that because their sins are enormous or frequent, there is little hope for them to get better. They dread returning to Allah because shame overwhelms them. Although the word ‘tawbah’ is translated as ‘repentance,’ its root word means “to return to.” Believers must never lose hope in Allah’s infinite mercy. If we feel guilty for committing sins, we should return to Allah by focusing on Allah’s infinite generosity and kindness and not on our sins.)

The Sura ends with a vivid description of the contrasting fates of disbelievers: *“... Enter you the gates of hell, to dwell therein, and evil is the abode of the arrogant”* (39:72) and that of the believers: *“... those who*

*feared their Lord will be led to the Garden in groups until behold, they arrive there. Its gates will be opened and its keepers will say, 'Peace be upon you! You have done well, so enter you here, to dwell therein.'"* (39:73)

And what will they see there? "... *Angels surrounding the Divine Throne on all sides, singing Glory and Praise to their Lord ... and the words on all sides will be 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.'*" (39:75)

Notice how the verse from Sura Fatiha, the Opening Chapter, (*Alhamdu Lillahi Rabbil 'Alameen*), is made manifest for believers blessed with *Jannatul Firdous!*

(Sura Mumin – also known as Al-Ghafir, The Forgiver - is a Makki Sura)  
Sura al-Mumin (The Believer) (Verses 40:1-85)

(Allah is Al-Ghafir, the Forgiver or the All-Forgiving. Two other related names of Allah that occur in the Quran are Al-Ghafur and Al-Ghaffar. All three derive from the root word 'Ghfr,' which means covering and hiding. For Allah, these Divine names refer to the One who forgives when we commit sins. Allah forgives again and again, the same sin or different types of sins, when a believer repents, except when one consciously, knowingly, and deliberately commits shirk, that is, assigns partners to Allah. Sura 23, called *Muminun* or Believers (plural), deals with the collective manifestation of faith, virtue, and action. In this Sura, it is about the individual's witness to faith, virtue, and action.)

The Sura begins with a listing of Allah's attributes: "*The revelation of this Book is from Allah, Exalted in Power and full of Knowledge, Who forgives sin and accepts repentance, is severe in punishment, is all-Bountiful. There is no God but He: To Him is the final goal.*" (40:2-3)

The Sura points out the absurdity of the idea that man is self-sufficient. His false pride makes him think he controls his destiny, which leads him to rely exclusively on human knowledge and false deities such as wealth and power. He scoffs at the idea of Divine knowledge and rejects any notion of 'The Day of Reckoning.'

References to stories of earlier prophets illustrate these symptoms:

*"None but the unbelievers dispute the revelations of God. Do not be deceived by their ostentatious posturing in this life." (40:4)*

*"... only those receive admonition who turn to Allah." (40:13)*

*"Musa said: 'I have indeed called upon my Lord and your (Pharaoh's) Lord for protection from every arrogant one who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning!'" (40:27)*

Notice the sublime promise in verse (40:13): Only those who seek Allah's mercy, forgiveness, and protection receive Allah's guidance, which may be in the form of admonition to remain on the Straight Path when they are in danger of going astray.

There is *"a believer, a man from among the people of Pharaoh, who had concealed his faith" (40:28)*, who speaks truth to power, that is, to Pharaoh, without fear (the *al-Mumin* of the title of the Sura). He gives the longest speech in the Quran, comprising 17 verses, including Pharaoh's arrogant retorts and non-sequiturs (40:28-44). Notice how sound his logic is and how powerful his case. When Pharaoh threatens to slay Musa (AS), he tells him, *"Will you slay a man because he says, 'My Lord is Allah?' ... If he (Musa) is a liar, on him is the sin of his lie. But if he is telling the truth, then will fall on you something of the calamity of which he warns you ... who will help us from the punishment of Allah should it befall us?" (40:28-29)*



There is a back-and-forth between the man and Pharaoh. Pharaoh says to his deputy, *"O Haman! Build me a lofty palace that I may attain the ways and means ... of reaching the heavens, and that I may look up the God of Musa, but surely I think Musa is a liar. Thus was made alluring in Pharaoh's eyes the evil of his deeds ..."* (40:36-37) But the man is fearless in proclaiming the truth to Pharaoh and the people: *"O my people! This life of the present is nothing but a temporary enjoyment. It is the Hereafter that is the home that will last. He that works evil will not be requited but by the like thereof. And he that works a righteous deed, whether man or woman and is a believer, such will enter the Garden of Bliss ..."* (40:39-40) He concludes by saying, *"Soon will you remember what I say to you now. My own affair I commit to Allah, for Allah ever watches over His servants."* (40:44)

Allah says of this believer: *"Then Allah saved him from every evil that they plotted against him ... the brunt of the chastisement encompassed on all sides the people of Pharaoh."* (40:45)

(Point to ponder: Who and where are the fearless people who will speak truth to the modern-day Pharaohs, both in the East and in the West?)

We are again reminded of the criteria for success: *"Patiently, then, persevere, for the promise of Allah is true, and ask forgiveness for your fault, and celebrate the praises of your Lord in the evening and in the morning. Those who dispute the Signs of Allah without any authority bestowed on them, in their heart there is nothing but the quest for greatness, which they shall never attain. Seek refuge, then, in Allah. It is He Who hears and sees all things."* (40:55-56)

The irrationality of the human-centered worldview is made clear: *"Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth; yet most men do not understand!"* (40:57)

The Quran asks the Prophet (s.a.w) (and thus all believers) to “*remain patient in adversity, for surely, Allah’s promise always comes true. Whether or not We show you in this world something of what We hold in store for those deniers of the truth, or whether We cause you to die before the punishment comes, know that in the end, it is unto Us that they will be brought back.*” (40:77)

(The verse answers the question that unsettles some of us: How is it that some wicked people seem to escape punishment on this earth? Allah assures us that there will be an ultimate reckoning and accountability because, in the end, they will be brought back to Him. He alone decides whether the punishment will befall them in this life or the Hereafter. A believer completely and unconditionally trusts Allah’s judgment. Also, note that to ‘remain patient in adversity’ includes not only the ability to wait patiently but also to keep a good attitude while waiting.)

As in verse (4:164), the Quran subtly repeats the truth of Allah sending Messengers to every people, some of whom are mentioned in the Quran – 25 in all - and others who are not. Addressing Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), Allah says, “*We did in time past send Messengers before you: Of them there are some whose stories We have related to you, and some whose stories We have not related to you. No messenger could bring a Sign except by the permission of Allah ...*” (40:78) Notice the phrase “By the permission of Allah.” We found this phrase before in (5:110). Nothing happens unless Allah Wills it.

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