

Sura 15: Al-Hijr (Stoneland)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

This is a Meccan Sura. According to the chronological order it comes after Surat Joseph. It was revealed during the period between the year of sadness and the time of migration to Medina. This was a critical time in the life of the Prophet (PBUH). The narrative in the Sura reflects the nature of this period. The Sura includes clear and realistic instructions to the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslim community to help them in their struggle against the disbelievers.

After the death of the Prophet's uncle, Abu Taleb, the spread of Islam slowed down. The persecution of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions at the hands of the idolaters of Mecca intensified and the levels of mockery and derision exercised by the idolaters against the Message and the Messenger (PBUH) escalated. Quranic verses revealed during this period responded by threatening the idolaters with a fate similar to previous generations of disbelievers. Examples of previous peoples who were punished and cities which were destroyed were cited. The verses also attempted to console the Prophet (PBUH) and to explain that the rejection that he was facing was simply the result of the stubbornness of the disbelievers.

The style of the Sura and its content are similar to other Suras revealed during this phase of the history of the Muslim community. Similar to the other Suras revealed during the same period, it included the strategy that the Muslim community should adopt in order to deal successfully with the requirements of that phase in the progress of the Islamic movement. This strategy is also applicable whenever similar circumstances arise.

An important feature of the Quran is that it always provides a strategy that is tailored to the specific situation at hand. It takes into consideration the factors of time, place, and circumstances that are relevant to the specific situation. It is important to understand this feature because it is the key to understanding the Quran, its laws, and its objectives. One has to understand this feature in order to be able to understand the motives behind the strategies that were suggested by the Quran to deal with different situations. The verses of the Quran dealt with real life situations and took into consideration the realities of these situations. To understand the meaning and the objectives of the verses of the Quran one has to study the prevalent circumstances in each of these situations.

Those who are undertaking the responsibility of the Call to Islam at any time can correlate the difficulties they are having with the difficulties mentioned in the Sura. They experience the same adverse conditions that the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions experienced in the early days of Islam. The problem we are facing now is the same problem that existed then: the turning away from the comprehensive reality of this religion. One cannot accept the comprehensive reality of this religion without having an absolute belief in God. This will translate into applying His rules in all aspects of life. God's rules should be applied in matters of faith and rituals as well as in the political, economic, social, and ethical spheres.

Verses 1 to 15:

1. *Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book, a Quran that makes things clear.*
2. *It may be that those who disbelieve wish ardently that they were Muslims.*
3. *Let them eat and enjoy life, and let the hope (for worldly delights) beguile them. They will soon know.*
4. *And never did We destroy a town but it had a decreed term made known.*
5. *Neither can a people anticipate its term, nor delay it.*
6. *And they said, "You, on whom the message has been revealed, you are indeed a madman.*
7. *Why do not you bring us angels, if you are truthful?"*
8. *We do not send the angels down except with the truth. (If they come to the ungodly), no respite would they have.*
9. *We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly be its guardian.*
10. *We did send messengers before you among different former communities.*
11. *But never came a messenger to them but they mocked him.*
12. *Even so We do let it creep into the hearts of the sinners.*
13. *They do not believe in it, though the example of the former peoples has already passed.*
14. *And even if We opened to them a gate into heaven and they kept ascending through it.*
15. *They would only say, "Our eyes have been dazzled. No, we have been bewitched by sorcery." (15: 1-15)*

This is the first group of verses in this Sura. It talks about the nature of the Book which was rejected by the idolaters. The verses threaten the idolaters of a day when they wish they had been Muslims. The verses also explain why God's punishment has been delayed. They are told that God has decreed that the punishment will occur on a previously designated date. The verses refer to their request that angels should bring the message. They are told that the angels will come only to exact God's punishment. The verses finally state that the reason behind their rejection is not the lack of evidence of the truth of the Message but because they are arrogant and stubborn.

"Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book, a Quran that makes things clear." The Book has been written using these Alphabetical letters. Although everyone is familiar with these letters but it takes a miracle to use it to compose the Quran. This is beyond the ability of any human being. Those who rejected the Quran will wish one day they had accepted it, *"It may be that those who disbelieve wish ardently that they were Muslims."* The use of the word, "may be" carries the tones of threat and ridicule. When that day comes, it will be too late and they would have missed the opportunity. This is followed with another threat, *"Let them eat and enjoy life, and let the hope (for worldly delights) beguile them. They will soon know."* Let them lead a material life that is void of contemplation, thought, or curiosity. Leave them in their indulgence of material pleasures unaware of the passing of life, thinking that it will last for ever. But one day, when it will be too late, they will come to know the truth.

"And never did We destroy a town but it had a decreed term made known." They should not be deceived with the delay in punishment. God has decreed a limited span of time for each nation. God will extend this time for nations which believe, do good deeds, and remain on the straight path. If they swerve from the right path they meet their end and their decreed term expires. It

may be said that there are nations which do not believe nor do good deeds but they continue to flourish. This may be true if we examine the situation superficially but if we look deeper we find that these nations still harbor a measure of goodness. They may be contributing to the development of life on earth in some way, they may be instituting justice even in a narrow sense for their citizens, or they may be contributing to the material benefit of people. This goodness is a cause for life on earth to prosper and for justice to prevail even in a narrow sense. When this goodness expires, the lives of such nations expire. This is God's law. Every nation has a specific term, *"Neither can a people anticipate its term, nor delay it."*

The verses describe the rudeness of the idolaters in responding to the Prophet (PBUH). He brought them a Book which clarified everything and alerted them to the consequences of their deeds. However, they said to him, *"You, on whom the message has been revealed, you are indeed a madman."* Not only they rejected the Message in a rude way, but they also called the Prophet (PBUH), *"a madman."* They even went further asking him to bring down angels to support his message, *"Why do not you bring us angels, if you are truthful?"* The request of the disbelievers for angels to deliver the message is a sign that they do not have faith in their fellow human beings whom God has chosen to deliver the message. The response comes from God, *"We do not send the angels down except with the truth. (If they come to the ungodly), no respite would they have."*

The narrative then continued to assure them that it is God who sends His Messengers with guidance, *"We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly be its guardian."* If they were really interested in God's guidance, then they better believe in His Message which He revealed to His Messenger. It is God's mercy that He sent them a message instead of sending them angels to destroy them.

The promise has been fulfilled. The Quran has been kept intact for centuries. No one was able to tamper with it. There were many turbulent times in the history of Islam. During these times, many groups were formed each claiming that they were the true Muslims and the others were deviants. Each group tried to support its point of view using corrupted Prophetic traditions. However, no one of them was able to tamper with even one verse from the Quran. There are also times of decline during which Muslims were oppressed. Their enemies could have easily tampered with the Quran and the Muslims could not have raised a finger. But God kept the Quran intact as He promised.

God then consoled His Prophet (PBUH), *"We did send messengers before you among different former communities. But never came a messenger to them but they mocked him."* God sent many messengers before Muhammad (PBUH) and like him they were rejected by their people. God told His Messenger (PBUH) that his people's hearts, like the hearts of those who rejected their messengers before him, were not open to receive and benefit from the guidance that the messengers brought, *"Even so We do let it creep into the hearts of the sinners."* Even though, the Quran creeps into their hearts, but it does not leave any trace on them; as if they have never seen it. Those who reject guidance are all alike regardless of when they lived or where they lived, *"They do not believe in it, though the example of the former peoples has already passed."*

The problem was not that there was a lack of proof of the authenticity of the message. The problem was that they were blinded by their arrogance and stubbornness, “*And even if We opened to them a gate into heaven and they kept ascending through it. They would only say, ‘Our eyes have been dazzled. No, we have been bewitched by sorcery.’*” These two verses paint an image of their persistence in rejecting the faith. Imagine them ascending into the sky to a door that leads to heaven but they still reject the reality of what they see. They simply think that they are imagining things. Such a trip would be stronger as evidence than having angels coming down to them. But they would have still made an excuse not to believe saying, “*No, we have been bewitched by sorcery.*” This shows the extent of their stubbornness. The verses portrayed the arrogance of those who reject God and presented a model for all those who reject guidance. The materialists who reject God establish the social structure and the political and economic systems of their nations on the basis of the claim that the universe existed without a Creator; and that the universe does not need the Creator to manage and control it. They claim that these systems are ethical systems based on a scientific approach. Their failure to feel the existence of God, in spite of the cosmic signs that corroborate the need for a creator, indicates that their receptors have malfunctioned. The claim that the universe existed without a creator is against the initial natural disposition of the human being. It is an idea that is unacceptable to the normal human mind.

Verses 16 to 25:

16. *It is We who have set out the zodiacal signs in the heavens, and made them fair-seeming to the beholders;*
17. *And We have guarded them from every outcast devil.*
18. *Save him who steals the hearing, he will be pursued by a visible flame.*
19. *And We have spread out the earth, and placed in it firm mountains, and caused each balanced thing to grow in it.*
20. *And We have provided in it means of subsistence, for you and for those for whose sustenance you are not responsible.*
21. *And there is not a thing but with Us are the stores thereof. And we do not send it down except in appointed measure.*
22. *And We send the winds fertilising, then We caused water to descend from the sky, and gave it to you to drink. It is not you who are the holders of the store thereof.*
23. *And most surely We bring to life and cause to die and We are the heirs (of everything).*
24. *And certainly We have known those of you who have gone before and We certainly know those who shall come later.*
25. *And indeed, your Lord will gather them together. Indeed, He is Wise, Omniscient. (15: 16 – 25)*

“*It is We who have set out the zodiacal signs in the heavens, and made them fair-seeming to the beholders; And We have guarded them from every outcast devil. Save him who steals the hearing, he will be pursued by a visible flame.*” This is the first line in a large canvas. This canvas portrays the amazing universe; a canvas which speaks of the signs of the creative power, the meticulous management, and the accurate control behind the creation and the maintenance of

the universe. The word zodiacal signs may be a reference to the stars and planets or to their paths, either case they are signs of the power of the Creator, the accuracy of the control, and the beauty of the scene, *“and made them fair-seeming to the beholders.”* This is a subtle remark indicating that the beauty of the creation was a deliberate plan of God. The scene of the scattered stars over the blue clear sky is a beautiful scene that evokes many feelings in the hearts of the beholder. In addition to the beauty, God also provided protection for the sky; no devil can gain access to it. He protected its purity from being defiled by the temptation of the devil, *“And We have guarded them from every cursed devil.”* The verse refers to the devil who *“steals the hearing.”* The nature of the devil and how he will steal the hearing is a matter of the unseen. We will not attempt to discuss this because it is futile to speculate about the unseen. The message is that God will protect the sky from any attempt by the devil to penetrate it.

The second line in this amazing canvas is the scene of the extended land; it is easy to tread on, and it is supported by huge mountains. It provides plants and provisions for people and other living things, *“And We have spread out the earth, and placed in it firm mountains, and caused each balanced thing to grow in it.”* The verses describing the scenes of the sky and the earth are dominated by enormous structures. The sky has zodiacal signs, the earth has huge mountains, and the plants are well balanced. The verses go on to include the whole creation in the scene, *“And We have provided in it means of subsistence, for you and for those for whose sustenance you are not responsible.”* The verses not only refer to the cosmic creation of God but also to the living things that God created on earth. It reminds us of the fact that He is the provider not only for the human beings but also for the other living creatures. The human race is but one group of the living creation of God but there are other living creatures which God created and He provides for. It is by the grace of God that He created these living creatures to support the life of the human race on earth. God did not leave the responsibility of providing for these living creatures to the people but He provides for them Himself. These provisions, like everything else, are accurately measured according to God’s will, *“And there is not a thing but with Us are the stores thereof. And we do not send it down except in appointed measure.”* No one owns or controls the resources on earth. It is God who owns, controls, and disburses all the resources according to His will. These resources are allocated in an, *“appointed measure.”*

God sends the wind in an appointed measure, *“And We send the winds fertilising, then We caused water to descend from the sky, and gave it to you to drink. It is not you who are the holders of the store thereof.”* God sent the wind which delivers rain for people to drink however; they will not be able to store it. The wind blows according to certain physical laws, but who created these laws? It is the Creator who created them.

One notices that the verses defer all actions to God even the water that we drink, it is God who gave it to us to drink, *“gave it to you to drink.”* This can be interpreted that God created humans in such a way that they need water to survive, and He made the water available and beneficial for humans to drink. This flows well with the general theme of these verses. The verses stress the power of God and His ability to control and maintain all His creations. The verses continue along the same lines to stress that life and death are also under God’s control, *“And most surely We bring to life and cause to die and We are the heirs (of everything).”*

The underlying theme then changes to connect this group of verses with the verses in the first group above, “*And certainly We have known those of you who have gone before and We certainly know those who shall come later.*” God will certainly gather them together in the end “*And indeed, your Lord will gather them together. Indeed, He is Wise, Omniscient.*” The verse stresses that life and death are in God’s hand. He is the heir after life, He knows when each one will be put death

Verses 26 to 48:

26. *Verily We created man of potter's clay from an altered black mud.*
27. *And the jinn did We create aforetime of intensely hot fire.*
28. *And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, "I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay from altered black mud,*
29. *When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down prostrating to him."*
30. *So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together.*
31. *Except Iblis. He refused to be among those who prostrated.*
32. *(God) said, "Iblis, what is your reason for not being among those who prostrated themselves?"*
33. *(Iblis) said, "I am not one to prostrate myself to a mortal, whom You created out of potter's clay from altered black mud."*
34. *(God) said, "Then get you out from here; for you are outcast.*
35. *And the curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment."*
36. *(Iblis) said, "My Lord, give me then respite till the Day when they are raised."*
37. *He (God) said, "Indeed, you are of those reprieved;*
38. *Till the Day of the appointed time."*
39. *He (Iblis) said, "My Lord, because You has sent me astray, I verily shall adorn the path of error for them on the earth, and shall mislead them every one,*
40. *Except Your sincere servants."*
41. *He (God) said, "This is a right course incumbent upon Me.*
42. *You have no authority over My servants, except those who will follow you from among the ones who go astray.*
43. *And verily, Hell is the promised abode for all of them.*
44. *It has seven gates, and each gate has an appointed portion.*
45. *Those who are God conscious (will be) amid gardens and fountains.*
46. *(Their greeting will be), 'Enter you here in peace and security.'*
47. *And We shall remove whatever is in their breasts of rancor. (They will be) Brethren, face to face, (they rest) on couches raised.*
48. *No sense of fatigue shall touch them, nor shall they (ever) be asked to leave. (15: 26 – 48)*

This group of verses discuss the major story of humanity, the story of the initial natural disposition of humankind. It is also the story of guidance versus misguidance and the factors that affect both. It is the story of Adam (PBUH). From what has he been created? What were the

events that occurred during and after the process of his creation? This story has been discussed twice before in this book, the first time in Surat Al-Baqara (Chapter 2) and the second time in Surat Al-Aaraf (Chapter 7). However, the account that was given in the previous Suras served different purposes and consequently the presentation was different. Each account had its own style, environment, and tempo. However, the beginning of all three accounts had a common theme: the concept of establishing Adam (PBUH) on earth and making him a vicegerent. In Surat Al-Baqara the story of the creation of Adam (PBUH) started with the verse, *“It is He who created for you all things that are on earth; then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. And He knows all things.”* (2: 29). In Surat Al-Aaraf the verses which described the creation of Adam (PBUH) were preceded by the verse, *“And We have given you (humankind) power on earth, and appointed for you therein livelihoods. Little you give thanks.”* (7: 10). In this Sura, the story is preceded by the verse, *“And We have spread out the earth, and placed in it firm mountains, and caused each balanced thing to grow in it. And We have provided in it means of subsistence, for you and for those for whose sustenance you are not responsible.”* (15: 19)

However, as we mentioned before the account given in each Sura is unique. In Surat Al-Baqara the emphasis was on the establishment of Adam (PBUH) on earth as a vicegerent, *“And when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’”* (2: 30) The following verses explained the rationale behind the establishment of Adam (PBUH), *“They said, ‘Will You place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praise and glorify Your Holy (name)?’ He said, ‘I know what you know not.’ And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said, ‘Tell me the names of these if you are truthful.’ They said, ‘Glory be to You. We have no knowledge, except that which You have taught us. Verily, You are Omniscient, Wise.’ He said, ‘Adam, tell them their names.’ When he had told them, God said, ‘Did I not tell you that I know the unseen in the heavens and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?’”* (2: 30 – 33) The verses continued to narrate the story of God’s command, Satan’s disobedience, the temptation of Adam (PBUH) and his spouse, the descent of Adam (PBUH) and his spouse to live on earth to fulfil their undertaking as vicegerents after they have gone through the difficult experience which prepared them for life on earth, and finally their repentance.

In Surat Al-Aaraf the focus was on the enmity between humankind and Satan. The verses narrated Adam’s (PBUH) journey in heaven and how he was seduced by Satan; and Satan’s request for a reprieve from God and his vow to devote his life until the Day of Judgement to the temptation of the humankind. The verses emphasized the fact that human beings have the choice, if they obey God and do good deeds then they are readmitted to heaven from which their first father was driven out when he disobeyed God; while those who choose to follow Satan and disobey God will end up in Hell fire.

The story in the present Sura deals with the nature of Adam (PBUH) and the innate factors that affect his accepting or rejecting guidance. So, the verses start by stating that Adam (PBUH) was created from potter’s clay from an altered black mud. Then God breathed into Adam (PBUH) from His spirit, *“Verily We created man of potter’s clay from an altered black mud. And the jinn did We create aforesaid of intensely hot fire.”* The verses state clearly the difference between the nature of Adam (PBUH) and the nature of Satan. The former was created from clay and the latter was created from fire.

“And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay from altered black mud, When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down prostrating to him.’ So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together. Except Iblis. He refused to be among those who prostrated. (God) said, ‘Iblis, what is your reason for not being among those who prostrated themselves?’ (Iblis) said, ‘I am not one to prostrate myself to a mortal, whom You created out of potter's clay from altered black mud.’ (God) said, ‘Then get you out from here; for you are outcast. And the curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment.’” When did God speak to the angels? Where did this take place?

How did He speak to the angels? We do not have any answers to these questions. It is a matter of the unseen and there is no authentic text that provides answers to these questions. We also do not know how did God created Adam (PBUH) from clay. It may be said that the main elements that form the human body are the same elements that compose the clay. Then God breathed in Adam (PBUH) of His spirit. God’s spirit transformed this lowly formation of clay to the honored human species. The transformation gave the humankind unique characteristics and made him worthy of being a vicegerent on earth. How did this happen? Is it possible for the human creature to ever fathom how the Great Creator works?

We know that Satan was created from intensely hot fire and that he was created before Adam (PBUH). We do not know the nature of Satan nor do we know how he was created. However, he must have acquired some of the characteristics of the intensely hot fire from which he was created. One of these characteristics is the ability to affect clay causing it to change. This change could be harmful since the fire is very hot. We can sense also from the narrative that Satan is arrogant.

Humankind was created from potter’s clay and was given a breath from the spirit of God. The spirit differentiated him from the rest of God’s creation and made him able to reach to high heaven and made him worthy of the honor of connecting with God. The spirit gave humankind the ability to break the material barrier and be able to receive inspiration from God.

But humankind is weighed down to the earth by the muddy nature of his formation. This nature evokes in him the various desires which are required to satisfy the needs of the physical body. The physical body needs food, drink, and clothes. It has passion and carnal desires. Humankind is a mixture of these two components, physical and spirit. They are inseparable. The goal set for humankind is to maintain the balance between these two components. No component should be nurtured or satisfied on the account of the other component. It is neither desirable for human beings to suppress the needs of the physical body in favor of nurturing the spirit; nor it is desirable for them to indulge in the lusty desires of the physical body and ignore the lofty needs of the spirit. The former course of action could bring them nearer to the circle of angels while the latter course of action brings them nearer to the circle of animals. Neither scenario was intended for the human race. The objective of humankind is to reach and maintain a balance between the body and the spirit. The Prophet (PBUH) admonished three men, the first vowed to lead a celibate life, the second vowed to fast every day his whole life, and the third vowed to spend the whole night praying his whole life. He (PBUH) said according to ‘Aisha (RA), *“Whoever steered away from my tradition does not belong to me.”*

“So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together; except Iblis. He refused to be among those who prostrated.” The angles prostrated themselves to Adam (PBUH) because they do what they are commanded to do. But Iblis has a different nature he was created from fire while the angels were created from light. Iblis disobeyed the command. When he was asked why he did not obey the command he said, *“I am not one to prostrate myself to a mortal, whom You created out of potter's clay from altered black mud.”* The arrogant Satan ignored the fact that Adam (PBUH) was not created from clay only but he also carried a breath from God. Satan had to suffer the consequence of his disobedience, *“(God) said, ‘Then get you out from here; for you are rejected, accursed. And the curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment.’”*

The vindictive nature of Satan motivated him to seek revenge, *“(Iblis) said, ‘My Lord, give me then respite till the Day when they are raised.’”* God granted him the reprieve which he requested, *“He (God) said, ‘Indeed, you are of those reprieved till the Day of the appointed time.’”* Satan wanted time to exact his revenge against Adam (PBUH) and his progeny, *“He (Iblis) said, ‘My Lord, because You has sent me astray, I verily shall adorn the path of error for them on the earth, and shall mislead them every one, except Your sincere servants.’”* He defined the battle ground. He vowed to adorn the path of error for the children of Adam. However, he knew that he had no power over God’s sincere servants. God said, *“This is a right course incumbent upon Me. You have no authority over My servants, except those who will follow you from among the ones who go astray.”* This is God’s law. Satan has no power over God’s sincere servants. Their devotion to God protects them from succumbing to Satan’s adorned temptation. But those who choose to go astray will join Satan, *“And verily, Hell is the promised abode for all of them. It has seven gates, and each gate has an appointed portion.”*

On the other hand, those who remain conscious of God will be rewarded by an abode, *“amid gardens and fountains. (Their greeting will be), ‘Enter you here in peace and security.’ And We shall remove whatever is in their breasts of rancor. (They will be) Brethren, face to face, (they rest) on couches raised. No sense of fatigue shall touch them, nor shall they (ever) be asked to leave.”* Those who remain conscious of God protect themselves from God’s wrath by avoiding the roads that lead to this wrath. The contrast between those who will end up in paradise and those who will end up in Hell fire is to be noted. The sincere servants of God lead a peaceful and secure life in gardens full of springs. Peace and security will remove rancor and hatred from their hearts. On the other hand, Satan’s host live in fear and agony. Their hearts are full of envy and rancor.

Islam does not attempt to change the nature of humankind. It acknowledges the fact that people’s hearts may incorporate rancor. This is part of the human nature. Islam does not attempt to expunge these feelings from the hearts. Islam tries to attenuate the severity of such feelings and replace it with love and tolerance. Muslims should love only that which brings them nearer to God and should hate only that which separates them from God. How else can one describe faith? But in heaven rancor would be completely expunged from their hearts. Only pure and loving brotherhood remains. This is one of the characteristics that the people of heaven will enjoy. Whoever believes in God and finds that he /she enjoys this characteristic in this life should celebrate it and consider it a good omen for a future in heaven.

Verses 49 to 84:

49. *Tell My servants that I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy;*
50. *And that My torment will be indeed the most painful torment.*
51. *And tell them about the guests of Abraham.*
52. *When they entered his presence and said, "Peace," He said, "We are afraid of you."*
53. *They said, "Fear not, we give you glad tidings of a son endowed with great knowledge."*
54. *He said, "Do you give me glad tidings that old age has seized me? Of what, then, is your good news?"*
55. *They said, "We give you glad tidings in truth. So do not despair."*
56. *He said, "And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, save those who have gone astray?"*
57. *Abraham said, "Messengers (of God), what then is the business on which you (have come)?"*
58. *They said, "We have been sent to a people (deep) in sin,*
59. *(All) save the family of Lot. Them, we shall deliver every one,*
60. *Except his wife, whom We had decreed that she should be of those who stay behind."*
61. *And when the messengers came to the family of Lot,*
62. *He said, "You are unknown people."*
63. *They said, "We have come to you with that about which they disputed.*
64. *And we bring you the truth, and we are indeed truthful.*
65. *So travel with your household in a portion of the night, and follow behind them. Let none of you look back, but go where you are commanded."*
66. *And We revealed to him (the decree) of that matter: that the root of those (who did wrong) was to be cut off at the early morning.*
67. *And the people of the town came rejoicing.*
68. *He (Lot) said, "These are my guests, so do not disgrace me.*
69. *Be conscious of God and do not shame me."*
70. *They said, "Have we not forbidden you from (entertaining) anyone?"*
71. *He said, "Here are my daughters, if you must be doing (lawful marriage)."*
72. *Verily, by your life (Muhammad), in their wild intoxication, they wandered in distraction, to and fro.*
73. *But the (mighty) blast overtook them before morning,*
74. *And We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay.*
75. *In this are signs for those who discern.*
76. *And the (cities were) right on the high-road.*
77. *In this is a sign for the believers.*
78. *And the companions of the thicket were also wrongdoers.*
79. *So We exacted revenge on them. They were both on an open highway, plain to see.*
80. *And the dwellers of Al-Hijr denied the messengers.*
81. *And we gave them Our revelations, but they turned away from them.*
82. *And they used to carve out dwellings in the hills, (wherein they dwelt) secure.*
83. *But the (mighty) blast seized them at the early morning.*
84. *And what they earned did not avail them. (15: 49 -84)*

This group of verses portray a number of examples describing God's mercy and torment. These examples were given through a number of narratives: the glad tidings that the angels brought the old Prophet Abraham (PBUH), that a son will be born to him; the deliverance of Prophet Lot (PBUH) and his family except his wife who was among the wrongdoers; and the torment that the people of the thicket and the people of Al-Hijr suffered.

The previous verses described the reward that those who remain conscious of God will get and the torment that those who chose to go astray will suffer. God then issued this command to His Messenger (PBUH), *"Tell My servants that I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy; and that My torment will be indeed the most painful torment."* God mentioned His forgiveness before He talked about His torment, according to the fundamental principle which God decreed. God prescribed mercy on Himself. In some verses God's torment is mentioned first or even mentioned without a reference to God's mercy to illustrate a specific point that needs to be emphasized.

"And tell them about the guests of Abraham. When they entered his presence and said, 'Peace,' He said, 'We are afraid of you.'" The verse skips the details that was mentioned in Surat Hud (Chapter 11) which explain why was Prophet Abraham (PBUH) fearful of these people because the focus here was on the mercy of God which was expressed in the glad tidings that these messengers brought Prophet Abraham (PBUH). They said, *"Fear not, we give you glad tidings of a son endowed with great knowledge."* The immediate reaction of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was astonishment, *"He said, 'Do you give me glad tidings that old age has seized me? Of what, then, is your good news?'"* He was old and his wife was barren, how could they have a son? He needed to be reminded of God's mercy, *"They said, 'We give you glad tidings in truth. So do not despair.'"* Quickly he remembered and responded appropriately, *"He said, 'And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, save those who have gone astray?'"* One should note Prophet Abraham's (PBUH) reference to God's mercy. He also stated one of the fundamental principles, only those who go astray despair of God's mercy. The believers whose hearts are connected to God never despair because they know that no matter how difficult it gets, God's mercy is always near them. God controls the means as He controls the results.

When his fear was gone and he was reassured by the angels he wanted to know what is the business they came to conduct. He asked, *"Messengers (of God), what then is the business on which you (have come)?"* They answered, *"We have been sent to a people (deep) in sin, (All) save the family of Lot. Them, we shall deliver every one, except his wife, whom We had decreed that she should be of those who stay behind."* We note that the narrative here ignored the details of the dialogue that ensued between Abraham (PBUH) and the angels about Lot and his people. These details were mentioned previously in Surat Hud.

The narrative continues with the angels going to Lot (PBUH) and his people, *"And when the messengers came to the family of Lot, He said, 'You are unknown people.'"* This statement shows Lot's (PBUH) frustration. He knew what his people were after and he knew how will they behave towards his guests. He had no support to protect his guests and he was concerned for their safety. But the angels quickly explained to him that they came to impose God's

punishment, the punishment that they were promised but they doubted that it will ever happen, *“They said, ‘We have come to you with that about which they disputed. And we bring you the truth, and we are indeed truthful.’”* These assurances indicate the worried state of mind that Lot (PBUH) was in. They assured him first then gave him the command, *“So travel with your household in a portion of the night, and follow behind them. Let none of you look back, but go where you are commanded.”* The command indicated that Lot should leave the town with his followers during the night. He should be at the end of the caravan and he should make sure that no one of his followers looks back towards the town. The time for the destruction of the town was set for the morning, *“And We revealed to him (the decree) of that matter: that the root of those (who did wrong) was to be cut off at the early morning.”* Lot (PBUH) was made privy to the fact that the people of the town will be annihilated in the early morning.

This was a quick outline of the whole episode of the people of Lot (PBUH). It was given as an introduction to the full story which will follow. The detailed account starts when the people of the town came to know about Lot’s (PBUH) guests so they hurried towards his house, *“And the people of the town came rejoicing.”* The verse expresses the extent of the audacity of the people of Lot (PBUH). They came hurriedly in a group announcing their joy to have found a new prey to satisfy their desires. Lot (PBUH) was stressed trying to find a way to protect his guests and his honor as a host. He tried to argue with his people to evoke the feelings of God consciousness in their hearts, *“He (Lot) said, ‘They are my guests, do not disgrace me. Be conscious of God and do not shame me.’”* Instead of heeding his admonition, they blamed Lot (PBUH) that he is hosting these people, *“They said, ‘Have we not forbidden you from (entertaining) anyone?’”* Lot (PBUH) continued to argue with them exploring other ways to keep them away from his guests, *“He said, ‘Here are my daughters, if you must be doing (lawful marriage).”* Lot (PBUH) tried to address their initial natural disposition by urging them to form families according to the classical definition of the family.

The verses then turn to address the Prophet (PBUH) to describe the state of mind of the people of the town of Lot (PBUH). They were not going to change their life style, *“Verily, by your life (Muhammad), in their wild intoxication, they wandered in distraction, to and fro.”*

The scene ends with a description of the punishment that had been decreed, *“But the (mighty) blast overtook them before morning, And We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay.”* The verses describe the devastation that was inflicted on the town of Lot (PBUH). It was said that what happened to the town of Lot (PBUH) can be caused by an earthquake. We are certain that cosmic phenomena occur according to God’s physical laws. But God who established the physical laws in the first place is also able to change their outcomes. It is not necessary then to assume that an earthquake was needed to destroy the town of Lot (PBUH). God has the power to destroy any town with whatever means He wills and whenever He wills. He only needs to say, “Be,” and it will be. This is the approach of the believer in understanding the miracles which were brought about by God’s messengers.

The town of Lot (PBUH) lies on the road between Saudi Arabia and Syria. Travellers between these two destinations pass by its geographical location often. There are lessons and admonitions for those who watch and reflect. However, only open hearts which are able to receive the admonitions are able to benefit from these accounts, *“In this are signs for those who discern.”*

And the (cities were) right on the high-road. In this is a sign for the believers.”

The people of Shu'ayb (PBUH) (the companions of the thicket) and the people of Saleh (PBUH) (the companions of Al-Hijr) had similar experiences, *“And the companions of the thicket were also wrongdoers. So, We exacted revenge on them.”* The detailed account of the discourse between Shu'ayb (PBUH) and his people has been given in other Suras. In this Sura, the verses refer to their wrongdoing and the consequence of their deeds. They have been punished and their town was destroyed when their term ended. This confirms the verse in the beginning of Sura which stated that each people have an appointed term. The city of Median and the thicket were near the town of Lot (PBUH). The verse, *“They were both on an open highway, plain to see,”* could be a reference to Median and the thicket since they are located on a clear road or it could be a reference to the towns of Lot (PBUH) and Shu'ayb (PBUH) both of them are located on the road from Saudi Arabia and Syria. The sites of these towns were on a road travelled by many which make them a suitable reminder of the fate of the disbelievers.

The companions of the Al-Hijr are the people of Saleh (PBUH). The site of their town is still known till the present day. They have carved their houses in the mountains, *“And the dwellers of Al-Hijr denied the messengers.”* The verse refers to Prophet Saleh (PBUH) in the plural form simply because he brought to them the same message that all other prophets brought to their people. So if they reject Saleh (PBUH) it is as if they rejected all the prophets. *“And we gave them Our revelations, but they turned away from them.”* God sent the camel as a sign to support Prophet Saleh (PBUH). But God's signs are many and they are all around us. We can see God's sign in the universe and in ourselves. The people of Saleh (PBUH) not only rejected the specific miracle that came to them but they also rejected all God's signs that surround them.

“And they used to carve out dwellings in the hills, (wherein they dwelt) secure. But the (mighty) blast seized them at the early morning. And what they earned did not avail them.” The verses portray a huge leap from a secure state to a complete devastation. They were secure in their formidable houses carved out in the mountains; they were probably just waking up from a comfortable sleep and suddenly the blast seized them and they were not able to escape the annihilation.

This brings us to the end of these three quick accounts which act as illustrative examples of the application of the verse stating God's law that a town is only destroyed when God's decreed term has been reached.

Verses 85 to 99:

85. *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except with the truth, and the Hour will certainly come. So forbear, (Muhammad), with a gracious forbearance.*

86. *Indeed, your Lord is the Creator of all things, the Omniscient.*

87. *We have given you seven of the oft-repeated (verses) and the great Quran.*
88. *Do not extend your eyes toward that which We have given (certain) categories of them to enjoy. And do not grieve on their account, and lower your wing (in tenderness) for the believers.*
89. *And say, "Surely, I am the plain warner."*
90. *Such as We send down for those who make divisions,*
91. *Those who break the Quran into parts.*
92. *So, by your Lord, We will most certainly question them all,*
93. *About what they used to do.*
94. *Therefore, declare openly what you are commanded with and turn away from the polytheists.*
95. *Indeed, We are sufficient for you against those who scoff,*
96. *Those who adopt, with God, another god. They will soon come to know.*
97. *We do indeed know how your heart is distressed at what they say.*
98. *Therefore, celebrate the praise of your Lord, and be of those who prostrate. And serve your Lord until there comes to you that which is certain. (15: 85 -99)*

“And We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except with the truth, and the Hour will certainly come. So forgive, (Muhammad), with a gracious forgiveness. Indeed, your Lord is the Creator of all things, the Omniscient.” The previous stories are capped with this articulate and meaningful passage. The verses indicate that the creation is entrenched in truth. God created everything to fulfill a definite purpose in consonance with His planning and wisdom. The creation of the heaven and earth was not accidental but it was designed, created, and controlled with deliberate perfect planning. The term truth indicates that the creation of the universe was perfect and the control of the universe is perfect. The promise of God is the truth and the Day of Judgement will certainly come. So Muhammad, be gracious in your forgiveness and free your heart from hate and rancor. Your Lord is certainly the Creator, the Omniscient.

The truth of the Message emanates from the truth of the creation, *“We have given you seven of the oft-repeated (verses) and the great Quran.”* Most probably the term *“seven of the oft-repeated (verses),”* refers to Surat Al-Fatiha (Chapter 1) and the term *“the great Quran,”* refers to the rest of the Quran. The reference to the Quran in this verse connects the Quran to the original truth that upholds the existence of the universe. The Quran is one of the fundamental aspects of the truth. It embodies God’s laws and attracts the human heart to them. The Quran reveals God’s signs in people and in the universe and encourages the hearts to understand these signs. The Quran reveals the means of achieving guidance and the roads that lead people astray. The Quran is part of the truth of this universe. It is an everlasting document that will continue to direct life in spite of the rejection and denials of the disbelievers.

Having been given these seven oft repeated verses and the greatest Quran, both originate in the truth and embody the truth, it does not behove Muhammad (PBUH) to be interested in the transient pleasures of this world, *“Do not extend your eyes toward that which We have given (certain) categories of them to enjoy. And do not grieve on their account, and lower your wing (in tenderness) for the believers.”* The eye does not extend, it is only the sight that can extend, but the expression paints this picture of an eye going out of its place to see. The expression

paints an image of great interest and curiosity. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded not to be saddened by the fate of the disbelievers. They will be treated justly by God. In the meantime, be kind to the believers.

Your role is to warn people, *“And say, ‘Surely, I am the plain warner.’”* This is the same message that each and every messenger of God brought to his people. Some of these people were still living in the Arabian Peninsula like the Jews and the Christians who only believed in parts of the Quran, *“Such as We send down for those who make divisions, those who break the Quran into parts.”* They will certainly be held accountable, *“So, by your Lord, We will most certainly question them all, about what they used to do.”*

Then a command was issued to the Prophet (PBUH), *“Therefore declare openly what you are commanded and turn away from the polytheists. Indeed, We are sufficient for you against those who scoff, those who adopt, with God, another god. They will soon come to know.”* The Prophet (PBUH) was asked to make his call known. He was told that he should not fear the polytheists, God will take care of them. The disbelievers will soon come to know the consequences of their disbelief.

The Prophet (PBUH) was a human being. He could not control his feelings of annoyance when he heard people openly express their polytheism and utter obscenities against the Message of truth which he brought. The Prophet (PBUH) was given a cure for these feelings, *“We do indeed know how your heart is distressed at what they say. Therefore, celebrate the praise of your Lord, and be of those who prostrate. And serve your Lord until there comes to you that which is certain.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) continued to celebrate the praise of God all his life and he sought a remedy in praying to God until that which is certain came to him: death. Thus, the last message from the Sura was to turn away from the disbelievers and to seek refuge with God. One day the disbelievers will wish that they were Muslims.