STORIES FROM THE QUR'AN

SERIES 13

A CALL FROM THE DARKNESS

The Story of Prophet Yunus According to the Qur'an and Authentic Hadith



HJ CHE ALIM HJ CHE HARON

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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وَذَا ٱلنُّونِ إِذ ذَّهَبَ مُغَٰضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَن لَّن نَّقۡدِرَ عَلَيۡهِ فَنَادَىٰ فِي ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ أَن لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنتَ سُبۡحَٰنَكَ إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ

"And [mention] the man of the fish, when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darknesses, "There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."."

SURAH AL-ANBIYA' 21:87

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise is due to Allah, who hears the call of His servant from within the darkness, who accepts the repentance of one who admits his fault, and who saves the believers. Blessings and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who forbade his nation to say that one is better than Yunus ibn Matta, and upon his family and his Companions.

This eBook is specially dedicated to my beloved wife,

ZAHARAH MOHD LATIF;

my dear children,

MUHAMMAD HAFIZ, NOOR HAZWANI, ABDUL HAKIM, NOOR HIDAYAH, NOR AQILA and **NOR ATIQAH**;

and my sons- and daughters-in-law,

FAZILAH, MALEK, HANIN, FAIRIZAL and **FIRWAN**.

May Allah make us among those who quickly return to Him, who do not despair in the darkness, and who always remember Him in ease so that He remembers us in hardship. May this knowledge be ‘ilmun yuntafa‘u bih, knowledge that brings benefit.

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ABOUT THE COVER OF THIS EBOOK

The cover of this eBook does not depict any human being or creature. It shows **scenery**: **an open, barren shore** at dawn. On the sand grows **a broad-leafed creeping vine**. Before it stretches **a calm sea**, while the sky above is still **dark and starry**, and the light of dawn is beginning to break on the horizon.

The open shore and **the vine** are taken from the words of Allah: ***"But We threw him onto the open shore while he was ill"*** and ***"And We caused to grow over him a gourd vine"*** (37:145–146).

The dark sky above and the light of dawn below symbolise the passage of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ from darkness to safety, as he ***"called out within the darknesses"***, and Allah said: ***"So We responded to him and saved him from the distress"*** (21:87–88). **The dark blue band** at the bottom, framed by **fine gold lines**, is where the author's name appears.

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Colour guide: green box = verses of the Qur'an; gold box = Hadith; brown box = archaeological note; blue table = comparison. Underlined blue narrator names can be clicked to open the narrator's page on sunnah.com.

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A CALL FROM THE DARKNESS

Among all the prayers of the prophets recorded in the Qur'an, there is one prayer spoken from the darkest of places: in the belly of a fish, at the bottom of the sea, at night. That prayer is short — only a few words — yet the Messenger of Allah ﷺ promised that no Muslim ever prays with it except that Allah answers him. That is the prayer of Prophet Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ.

The story of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ is the story of a prophet who left his people in haste, was tested with darkness, and then returned to Allah with an honest confession. It is also the story of the only people in the Qur'an who believed when the punishment was already near, so the punishment was lifted from them. A surah of the Qur'an is named after him — Surah Yunus.

SURAH AL-AN'AM 6:86

وَإِسْمَٰعِيلَ وَٱلْيَسَعَ وَيُونُسَ وَلُوطًا ۚ وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot - and all [of them] We preferred over the worlds.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/6:86

Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ is mentioned together with the honoured prophets: ***"And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot"*** — ***"and all [of them] We preferred over the worlds"***. He is also mentioned in the list of prophets who received revelation (4:163). The Qur'an gives him two titles: ***Dhun-Nūn*** (21:87), "the man of the fish", and ***Ṣāḥibul-Ḥūt*** (68:48), "the companion of the fish".

Note: The translation of the Qur'anic verses in this eBook is Sahih International, which renders the name Yunus as Jonah. The grade of every Hadith is stated in the Hadith box, with a link to sunnah.com.

Surah	Verse	Name / title	What is emphasised
An-Nisa'	4:163	*Jonah*	Mentioned among the prophets who received revelation
Al-An'am	6:86	*Jonah*	Preferred over the worlds
Yunus	10:98	*The people of Jonah*	The only people who believed before the punishment struck, so the punishment was removed
Al-Anbiya'	21:87–88	*Dhun-Nun (the man of the fish)*	The prayer within the darknesses, and the promise of rescue for the believers
As-Saffat	37:139–148	*Jonah*	The fullest account: the ship, the lots, the fish, the shore, the vine and the people who believed
Al-Qalam	68:48–50	*Ṣāḥibul-ḥūt (the companion of the fish)*	Advice to Prophet Muhammad to be patient; Yunus chosen and made of the righteous

Figure 1: The six surahs that mention Prophet Yunus and his people, with his titles and what each emphasises.

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Figure 1 shows that the story of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ is spread across six surahs. His fullest story is in Surah As-Saffat (37:139–148), his prayer in Surah Al-Anbiya' (21:87–88), the faith of his people in Surah Yunus (10:98), and its lesson for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Surah Al-Qalam (68:48–50). This eBook gathers them all, guided by the Qur'an and authentic Hadith only.

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A MESSENGER TO A HUNDRED THOUSAND OR MORE

SURAH AS-SAFFAT 37:139

وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

And indeed, Jonah was among the messengers.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/37:139

Surah As-Saffat opens the story of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ with an affirmation: ***"And indeed, Jonah was among the messengers"***. Before telling of his fault, Allah affirms his rank as a messenger.

SURAH AS-SAFFAT 37:147

وَأَرْسَلْنَٰهُ إِلَىٰ مِاْئَةِ أَلْفٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

And We sent him to [his people of] a hundred thousand or more.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/37:147

COMMENTARY ON VERSE 37:147

First: A great people. ***"And We sent him to [his people of] a hundred thousand or more"***. Ibn Kathir explains that the phrase ***"or more"*** means their number was not less than a hundred thousand, but more. This shows that the people of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ were the inhabitants of a great city in their time. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 37:147

Second: Where were these people? The Qur'an does not name their land. The commentators, including Ibn Kathir, mention that Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was sent to the people of ***Naynawā*** (Nineveh), in the region of Mosul, northern Iraq. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 21:87 This name comes from tafsir reports, not from the Qur'an or authentic Hadith (see the Archaeological Notes in Chapter 10).

Third: His father was named Matta. The name of the father of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was mentioned by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself: ***"Yunus ibn Matta"*** (Sahih al-Bukhari 3413; Chapter 8). His further lineage is not detailed.

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GOING OFF IN ANGER

SURAH AL-ANBIYA' 21:87

وَذَا ٱلنُّونِ إِذ ذَّهَبَ مُغَٰضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَن لَّن نَّقۡدِرَ عَلَيۡهِ فَنَادَىٰ فِي ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ أَن لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنتَ سُبۡحَٰنَكَ إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٨٧

And [mention] the man of the fish, when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darknesses, "There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/21:87

COMMENTARY ON VERSE 21:87 — LEAVING HIS PEOPLE IN HASTE

First: Anger for the sake of Allah. ***"when he went off in anger"***. The commentators explain that Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was angry with his people because they kept denying him. His anger was for the sake of Allah, not for himself. Yet he left them before permission came from Allah. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 21:87

Second: The meaning of "We would not decree [anything] upon him". ***"thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him"***. The word ***naqdira*** here does not mean "to have power over", for it is impossible that a prophet would think Allah had no power over him. Ibn Kathir reports from Ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid and ad-Dahhak that its meaning is ***"to constrain"*** — he thought Allah would not put him in straitened circumstances because of his departure. Ibn Jarir at-Tabari supports this meaning with the verse ***"he whose provision is restricted"*** (65:7), which uses the same root word. Sahih International renders it as "decree", which points in the same direction.

SURAH AS-SAFFAT 37:140

إِذۡ أَبَقَ إِلَى ٱلۡفُلۡكِ ٱلۡمَشۡحُونِ ١٤٠

[Mention] when he ran away to the laden ship.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/37:140

Third: "Ran away" — a stern description. ***"when he ran away to the laden ship"***. The Arabic word ***abaqa*** was originally used for a slave who runs away from his master. Scholars explain that Allah used this word to show the gravity of a messenger leaving his duty without permission, even with good intentions. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 37:140

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The lesson is great for every caller to Allah, teacher and parent: **do not despair of people sooner than Allah decrees**. A people who reject today may believe tomorrow — just as the people of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ themselves did (Chapter 6).

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THE LADEN SHIP AND THE DRAWING OF LOTS

SURAH AS-SAFFAT 37:140–142

إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى ٱلْفُلْكِ ٱلْمَشْحُونِ ﴿١٤٠﴾

[Mention] when he ran away to the laden ship.

فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُدْحَضِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾

And he drew lots and was among the losers.

فَٱلْتَقَمَهُ ٱلْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ ﴿١٤٢﴾

Then the fish swallowed him, while he was blameworthy.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/37:140-142

COMMENTARY ON VERSES 37:140–142

First: The laden ship. Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ boarded ***"the laden ship"*** — ***al-fulkil-mashḥūn***. The commentators mention that the ship was struck by waves and was about to sink because of its heavy load, so the passengers agreed to lighten it. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 37:141

Second: The drawing of lots. ***"And he drew lots and was among the losers"***. Lots were drawn to decide who had to go into the sea, and the lot fell on Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ. The commentators mention that the lots were drawn more than once, and each time they fell on him. The Qur'an only says that he was ***among the losers***; the number of draws is not mentioned in any authentic text.

Third: Swallowed by the fish. ***"Then the fish swallowed him, while he was blameworthy"***. The word ***al-ḥūt*** means a large fish. The Qur'an does not mention its species — whether a whale or otherwise — because the species does not matter; what matters is that Allah commanded the fish to swallow him and keep him safe.

Fourth: "Blameworthy". The word ***mulīm*** means one who has done something deserving of rebuke. Scholars explain that it refers to Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ leaving without permission, not to a major sin. The prophets are protected from major sins; yet Allah rebukes them in smaller matters because of their high rank. This is the meaning of the scholars' saying: ***"the good deeds of the righteous are shortcomings for those brought near (to Allah)"***.

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Figure 2: The flow of the story of Prophet Yunus in the Qur'an — from his sending until his people believed.

Figure 2 gathers these events in order. Notice that the turning point of this story is not when Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was swallowed by the fish, but when he ***called out within the darknesses***.

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THE CALL WITHIN THE DARKNESSES

SURAH AL-ANBIYA' 21:87–88

وَذَا ٱلنُّونِ إِذ ذَّهَبَ مُغَٰضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَن لَّن نَّقۡدِرَ عَلَيۡهِ فَنَادَىٰ فِي ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ أَن لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنتَ سُبۡحَٰنَكَ إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

And [mention] the man of the fish, when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darknesses, "There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."

فَٱسۡتَجَبۡنَا لَهُۥ وَنَجَّيۡنَٰهُ مِنَ ٱلۡغَمِّۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُنجِي ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

So We responded to him and saved him from the distress. And thus do We save the believers.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/21:87-88

COMMENTARY ON VERSE 21:87 — THREE PHRASES THAT SAVED HIM

First: Layered darkness. ***"he called out within the darknesses"*** **—** ***fiẓ-ẓulumāt***, in the plural. Ibn Kathir reports from Ibn Mas'ud رضى الله عنه that these were three darknesses: ***the darkness of the fish's belly, the darkness of the sea, and the darkness of the night***. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 21:87

Second: The content of the prayer. The prayer contains three phrases:

Lā ilāha illā anta* — *"There is no deity except You". This is tawhid: the confession that there is no one to rely on but Allah.

Subḥānaka* — *"exalted are You". This is tasbih: declaring Allah free of any injustice. What befell him was not an injustice from Allah.

Innī kuntu minaẓ-ẓālimīn* — *"Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers". This is confession: the fault came from himself.

Third: A prayer without a request. Like the prayer of Ayyub عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ (Series 12), the prayer of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ does not say "save me". He only declared the oneness of Allah, glorified Him, and admitted his fault — and Allah saved him. The same kind of prayer was spoken by Adam عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ and Hawwa': ***"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves"*** (7:23; Series 1), and by Musa عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: ***"My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself"*** (28:16).

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COMMENTARY ON VERSE 21:88 — A PROMISE FOR EVERY BELIEVER

"So We responded to him and saved him from the distress". Then Allah adds a promise that makes this story belong to every believer: ***"And thus do We save the believers"***. This prayer is not for Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ alone; it is the key of rescue for every believer trapped in his own darkness.

HADITH — JAMI' AL-TIRMIDHI, NO. 3505

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَحْيَى، حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يُوسُفَ، حَدَّثَنَا يُونُسُ بْنُ أَبِي إِسْحَاقَ، عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ سَعْدٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ سَعْدٍ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم « دَعْوَةُ ذِي النُّونِ إِذْ دَعَا وَهُوَ فِي بَطْنِ الْحُوتِ لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ. فَإِنَّهُ لَمْ يَدْعُ بِهَا رَجُلٌ مُسْلِمٌ فِي شَيْءٍ قَطُّ إِلاَّ اسْتَجَابَ اللَّهُ لَهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas رضى الله عنه said: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: **"The supplication of Dhun-Nun when he supplicated in the belly of the fish: "Lā ilāha illā anta, subḥānaka, innī kuntu minaẓ-ẓālimīn" (There is no god but You; glory be to You; indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers). No Muslim ever supplicates with it for anything except that Allah answers him."**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam at-Tirmidhi: from Muhammad ibn Yahya adh-Dhuhli, from Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Firyabi, from Yunus ibn Abi Ishaq, from Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn Sa'd, from his father, Muhammad ibn Sa'd, from Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam at-Tirmidhi in Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Book of Supplications, chapter on the supplication of Dhun-Nun, Hadith No. 3505. Also narrated by Ahmad and an-Nasa'i (as-Sunan al-Kubra).

GRADE: SAHIH — graded sahih by Darussalam and Shaikh al-Albani (Sahih at-Tirmidhi).

Source: https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:3505

COMMENTARY — A PRAYER PROMISED AN ANSWER

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ made this prayer one for ***"anything"*** — not only for being swallowed by a fish. Whoever is afflicted by hardship in life, illness, debt or sorrow may pray with the same words. The condition is a heart that truly affirms the oneness of Allah and honestly admits its own fault.

SURAH AS-SAFFAT 37:143–144

فَلَوْلَآ أَنَّهُۥ كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُسَبِّحِينَ ﴿١٤٣﴾

And had he not been of those who exalt Allah.

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لَلَبِثَ فِي بَطْنِهِۦٓ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

He would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/37:143-144

COMMENTARY ON VERSES 37:143–144 — REMEMBRANCE IN TIMES OF EASE

"And had he not been of those who exalt Allah", ***"He would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected"***. Ibn Kathir explains that what saved Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was not only his glorification inside the fish, but also his righteous deeds and remembrance **before** that, in times of ease. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 37:143

This is a very important lesson: **know Allah in times of ease, and He will know you in times of hardship**. Remembrance built over a lifetime becomes provision for the darkest moment.

How long did Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ remain in the belly of the fish? Ibn Kathir mentions differing views — a day, three days, seven days or forty days — and concludes: ***"Allah knows best how long it was."*** The Qur'an and authentic Hadith do not mention it. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 37:145

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THE OPEN SHORE AND THE GOURD VINE

SURAH AS-SAFFAT 37:145–146

فَنَبَذْنَٰهُ بِٱلْعَرَآءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ ﴿١٤٥﴾

But We threw him onto the open shore while he was ill.

وَأَنۢبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِّن يَقْطِينٍ ﴿١٤٦﴾

And We caused to grow over him a gourd vine.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/37:145-146

COMMENTARY ON VERSES 37:145–146

First: Thrown out in weakness. ***"But We threw him onto the open shore while he was ill"***. The word ***al-'arā'*** means open, empty land, without trees or buildings. Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ came out weak and ill, like a newborn child.

Second: A plant grown for him. ***"And We caused to grow over him a gourd vine" — shajaratan min yaqṭīn***. Ibn Kathir reports from Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn 'Abbas and Mujahid that ***yaqṭīn*** is the gourd plant. Its broad leaves gave shade, and its fruit can be eaten. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 37:146

Third: The gourd, a food the Messenger ﷺ loved. In Sahih al-Bukhari, Anas ibn Malik رضى الله عنه relates that he saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ seeking out the pieces of gourd around the dish, and said: "Since that day, I have always loved gourd." (Sahih al-Bukhari 5379). This Hadith does not mention Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ, but it shows the honour of the plant that Allah chose to shelter His prophet.

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SURAH AL-QALAM 68:49–50

لَّوْلَآ أَن تَدَٰرَكَهُۥ نِعْمَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ لَنُبِذَ بِٱلْعَرَآءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

If not that a favor from his Lord overtook him, he would have been thrown onto the naked shore while he was censured.

فَٱجْتَبَىٰهُ رَبُّهُۥ فَجَعَلَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

And his Lord chose him and made him of the righteous.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/68:49-50

COMMENTARY ON VERSES 68:49–50 — A FAVOUR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Surah Al-Qalam adds a subtle detail: ***"If not that a favor from his Lord overtook him, he would have been thrown onto the naked shore while he was censured"***. Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was indeed thrown onto the open shore (37:145), but **not while censured** — because the favour of Allah had reached him first. His repentance was accepted before he reached the shore.

Then: ***"And his Lord chose him and made him of the righteous"***. After the trial, Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was not only forgiven, but chosen and honoured. A fault repented of honestly can become the beginning of a higher rank.

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A PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE

SURAH YUNUS 10:98

فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ ءَامَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَآ إِيمَٰنُهَآ إِلَّا قَوْمَ يُونُسَ لَمَّآ ءَامَنُوا۟ كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ عَذَابَ ٱلْخِزْىِ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَمَتَّعْنَٰهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٩٨﴾

Then has there not been a [single] city that believed so its faith benefited it except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life and gave them enjoyment for a time?

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/10:98

COMMENTARY ON VERSE 10:98 — THE ONLY PEOPLE

First: An exception in history. In this series we have seen the peoples of Nuh, 'Ad, Thamud, Lut and Madyan destroyed after denying their messengers. Surah Yunus mentions one exception: ***"has there not been a [single] city that believed so its faith benefited it except the people of Jonah"***? They believed before the punishment fell upon them.

Second: A punishment averted. ***"When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life"***. The commentators mention that when the people saw the signs of punishment and realised Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ had left them, they went out together, repented and cried out to Allah, and Allah lifted the punishment from them. Tafsir Ibn Kathir 10:98

Third: Repentance accepted before it is too late. This is unlike Pharaoh, who believed when he was already drowning (10:90–91), and his faith was not accepted. The door of repentance is open as long as the punishment has not truly fallen and the soul has not reached the throat.

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SURAH AS-SAFFAT 37:147–148

وَأَرۡسَلۡنَٰهُ إِلَىٰ مِاْئَةِ أَلۡفٍ أَوۡ يَزِيدُونَ ١٤٧

And We sent him to [his people of] a hundred thousand or more.

فَـَٔامَنُواْ فَمَتَّعۡنَٰهُمۡ إِلَىٰ حِينٖ ١٤٨

And they believed, so We gave them enjoyment [of life] for a time.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/37:147-148

"And they believed, so We gave them enjoyment [of life] for a time". The story ends with a reunion: the prophet who had left in anger returns to a people who have believed. Both — the prophet and his people — returned to Allah.

The lesson for us: **do not despair of anyone's guidance**. A people who once rejected can change, and Allah accepts their repentance. ***"do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins"*** (39:53).

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"BE NOT LIKE THE COMPANION OF THE FISH"

SURAH AL-QALAM 68:48

فَٱصۡبِرۡ لِحُكۡمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُن كَصَاحِبِ ٱلۡحُوتِ إِذۡ نَادَىٰ وَهُوَ مَكۡظُومٞ ﴿٤٨﴾

Then be patient for the decision of your Lord, [O Muhammad], and be not like the companion of the fish when he called out while he was distressed.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/68:48

COMMENTARY ON VERSE 68:48 — ADVICE TO THE MESSENGER ﷺ

Surah Al-Qalam is among the earliest surahs revealed in Makkah, when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ faced fierce opposition from his people. Allah said to him: ***"Then be patient for the decision of your Lord, [O Muhammad], and be not like the companion of the fish"***.

First: Patience in awaiting Allah's decision. Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was rebuked for not waiting for Allah's permission. So the Messenger ﷺ was commanded to be patient and not hasten against his people. And he truly was patient — for thirteen years in Makkah, then in Madinah, until the people of Makkah themselves embraced Islam in great numbers.

Second: A prayer in distress. ***"when he called out while he was distressed" — wa huwa makẓūm***, filled with grief held within. The verse acknowledges the heaviness of the feelings of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ, and at the same time shows that his prayer was heard.

Third: A rebuke full of compassion. Allah does not mention the name of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ in this verse, only his title. And the rebuke is immediately followed by praise: ***"And his Lord chose him and made him of the righteous"*** (68:50). The Qur'an does not belittle the prophets; it educates through their stories.

The same advice is given to the Messenger ﷺ in other verses, that he should not destroy himself with grief over his people's rejection (18:6; 26:3), and that he should be patient ***"as were those of determination among the messengers"*** (46:35).

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THE STANDING OF PROPHET YUNUS IN THE HADITH

Some might think that because Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was once rebuked, his rank is lower than that of the other prophets. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ firmly rejected this thought.

"DO NOT SAY I AM BETTER THAN YUNUS"

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 3413

حَدَّثَنَا حَفْصُ بْنُ عُمَرَ، حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ، عَنْ قَتَادَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي الْعَالِيَةِ، عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ ـ رضى الله عنهما ـ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « مَا يَنْبَغِي لِعَبْدٍ أَنْ يَقُولَ إِنِّي خَيْرٌ مِنْ يُونُسَ بْنِ مَتَّى ». وَنَسَبَهُ إِلَى أَبِيهِ.

TRANSLATION:

Ibn 'Abbas رضى الله عنهما narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: **"It is not fitting for a servant to say: I am better than Yunus ibn Matta."** And he attributed Yunus to his father.

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Hafs ibn 'Umar, from Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaj, from Qatadah ibn Di'amah, from Abu al-'Aliyah ar-Riyahi, from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas رضى الله عنهما.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of the Prophets, chapter on the saying of Allah {Wa inna Yunusa lamina al-mursalin} (37:139), Hadith No. 3413. Also narrated by al-Bukhari from Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه (Nos. 3416, 4604) and Ibn Mas'ud رضى الله عنه (No. 3412), and by Muslim (Nos. 2376, 2377).

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3413

First: A specific prohibition. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ is the leader of all the prophets. Yet he forbade anyone to say that he himself — or the Messenger ﷺ — is better than Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ. In the narration of Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه, he said: ***"Whoever says: I am better than Yunus ibn Matta, has lied"*** (Sahih al-Bukhari 4604).

Second: Why is Yunus singled out? Scholars explain that because the Qur'an tells of the fault of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ, people might look down on him. So the Messenger ﷺ closed that door. An-Nawawi explains that this prohibition also means not comparing the prophets in a way that belittles any one of them.

Third: Mentioned with his father's name. The narrator says ***"and he attributed him to his father"*** — that is, he said "Yunus ibn Matta". This is the only authentic source for the name of the father of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ.

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YUNUS RECITING THE TALBIYAH

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 166

حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ حَنْبَلٍ، وَسُرَيْجُ بْنُ يُونُسَ، قَالاَ حَدَّثَنَا هُشَيْمٌ، أَخْبَرَنَا دَاوُدُ بْنُ أَبِي هِنْدٍ، عَنْ أَبِي الْعَالِيَةِ، عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم مَرَّ بِوَادِي الأَزْرَقِ فَقَالَ « أَىُّ وَادٍ هَذَا ». فَقَالُوا هَذَا وَادِي الأَزْرَقِ. قَالَ « كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَى مُوسَى - عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ - هَابِطًا مِنَ الثَّنِيَّةِ وَلَهُ جُؤَارٌ إِلَى اللَّهِ بِالتَّلْبِيَةِ ». ثُمَّ أَتَى عَلَى ثَنِيَّةِ هَرْشَى. فَقَالَ « أَىُّ ثَنِيَّةٍ هَذِهِ ». قَالُوا ثَنِيَّةُ هَرْشَى قَالَ « كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَى يُونُسَ بْنِ مَتَّى - عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ - عَلَى نَاقَةٍ حَمْرَاءَ جَعْدَةٍ عَلَيْهِ جُبَّةٌ مِنْ صُوفٍ خِطَامُ نَاقَتِهِ خُلْبَةٌ وَهُوَ يُلَبِّي ». قَالَ ابْنُ حَنْبَلٍ فِي حَدِيثِهِ قَالَ هُشَيْمٌ يَعْنِي لِيفًا.

TRANSLATION:

Ibn ‘Abbas رضى الله عنهما narrated: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed through the valley of al-Azraq and asked: “Which valley is this?” They said: “This is the valley of al-Azraq.” He said: **“It is as if I am looking at Musa ‘alaihis-salam coming down from the mountain path, raising his voice to Allah with the talbiyah.”** Then he came to the mountain path of Harsha and asked: “Which mountain path is this?” They said: “The mountain path of Harsha.” He said: **“It is as if I am looking at Yunus ibn Matta ‘alaihis-salam on a sturdy red she-camel, wearing a woollen cloak, the reins of his camel made of palm fibre, while he is reciting the talbiyah.”**

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Suraij ibn Yunus, from Hushaim ibn Bashir, from Dawud ibn Abi Hind, from Abu al-‘Aliyah ar-Riyahi, from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas رضى الله عنهما.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Faith, chapter on the Isra’ of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to the heavens and the obligation of prayer, Hadith No. 166.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim, the second most authentic book of Hadith after Sahih al-Bukhari.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:166a

This Hadith gives a beautiful picture: Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ, who once ***“ran away to the laden ship”***, is now described by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as a humble servant — wearing a woollen cloak, riding a camel with reins of palm fibre — answering the call of Allah: ***“Labbaik Allāhumma labbaik”***. A prophet who once went away now always answers the call of his Lord.

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SUPPLICATION IN TIMES OF DISTRESS

The story of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ teaches that prayer is the way out of darkness. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ also taught specific prayers for moments of distress.

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 6346

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ، حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى، عَنْ هِشَامِ بْنِ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، عَنْ قَتَادَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي الْعَالِيَةِ، عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم كَانَ يَقُولُ عِنْدَ الْكَرْبِ « لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ الْحَلِيمُ، لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ، لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ، وَرَبُّ الأَرْضِ، وَرَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْكَرِيمِ ». وَقَالَ وَهْبٌ حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ عَنْ قَتَادَةَ مِثْلَهُ.

TRANSLATION:

Ibn ‘Abbas رضى الله عنهما narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to say in times of distress: **“Lā ilāha illallāhul-‘aẓīmul-ḥalīm, lā ilāha illallāhu rabbul-‘arshil-‘aẓīm, lā ilāha illallāhu rabbus-samāwāti wa rabbul-arḍi wa rabbul-‘arshil-karīm”** (There is no god but Allah, the Mighty, the Forbearing; there is no god but Allah, Lord of the mighty Throne; there is no god but Allah, Lord of the heavens, Lord of the earth and Lord of the noble Throne).

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Musaddad ibn Musarhad, from Yahya ibn Sa‘id al-Qattan, from Hisham ad-Dastuwa’i, from Qatadah ibn Di‘amah, from Abu al-‘Aliyah ar-Riyahi, from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas رضى الله عنهما. A second chain: Wahb ibn Jarir, from Shu‘bah ibn al-Hajjaj, from Qatadah.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Supplications, chapter on supplicating in times of distress, Hadith No. 6346. Also narrated by Muslim (No. 2730).

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6346

COMMENTARY — THE LIKENESS WITH THE PRAYER OF YUNUS

Notice that this prayer, like the prayer of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ, **does not openly ask for anything**. It is full of tawhid — ***lā ilāha illallāh*** is repeated three times — and praise of Allah with His majestic attributes. A person in distress is taught to magnify Allah first, until the distress becomes small in his heart.

TAQWA AND A WAY OUT

“And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out”, ***“And will provide for him from where he does not expect”***. There is no place narrower than the belly of a fish at the bottom of the sea, yet Allah made a way out for Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ from where no one expected.

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SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:186

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/2:186

And Allah is always near: ***"indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me"***. If Allah heard a call from three layers of darkness, surely He hears our prayers wherever we are.

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WHAT THE QUR'AN DOES NOT TELL

The story of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ is also found in the Book of Jonah in the Bible, and some of its details have entered books of stories and sermons. Guided by the Hadith of Sahih al-Bukhari 4485 (Series 1), we neither affirm nor deny those details, and we do not make them part of the story we believe in. Some of them, however, must be rejected because they contradict the Qur'an.

POPULAR STORIES AND WHAT REVELATION SAYS

POPULAR STORY	WHAT THE QUR'AN AND AUTHENTIC HADITH SAY
Yunus was angry with God because God forgave the people of Nineveh, and asked to die (Book of Jonah 4).	MUST BE REJECTED. The prophets do not resent the mercy of Allah. The Qur'an mentions his anger with his people, before they believed (21:87).
Yunus fled from God's command so as not to preach at all, and headed for Tarshish.	The Qur'an mentions that Yunus left his people in anger, after calling them. The ship's destination is not named.
Yunus was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.	The length is not mentioned in the Qur'an or authentic Hadith. Ibn Kathir mentions several views and concludes: Allah knows best.
The fish was a whale, or it was in turn swallowed by a bigger fish.	The Qur'an only says al-hut, a large fish (37:142). Its species is not mentioned.
God sent a worm that ate the plant until it withered, and Yunus became angry (Book of Jonah 4:7–9).	The Qur'an only says that the plant was grown for him (37:146). The story of the worm and the anger of Yunus is not mentioned.
A sailor named James Bartley was swallowed by a whale in 1891 and survived, proving the story of Yunus.	NOT INCLUDED. Historical research found this story baseless (see the Archaeological Notes below). The story of Yunus is a miracle and needs no such proof.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTE: NINEVEH AND TELL NEBI YUNUS

Nineveh is an ancient city that **truly existed** and is famous in history. It was once the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and its ruins lie on the east bank of the River Tigris, opposite the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. Its ruins consist of two main mounds: **Kuyunjik** and **Tell Nebi Yunus** ("the Mound of Prophet Yunus").

On Tell Nebi Yunus stood a mosque and a shrine associated with Prophet Yunus for centuries. The mosque was **blown up by the IS group in 2014**. After Mosul was liberated, archaeologists from **Heidelberg University**, together with Iraqi archaeologists, have excavated the site since 2018 and found the remains of **the palace of King Esarhaddon** of the Assyrian Empire (7th century BCE), including winged bull sculptures. The report of the 2021–2023 seasons was published in the journal ***Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie*** (2025).

What is proven and what is not. These excavations prove the existence of the city of Nineveh and the palaces of its kings. However, **no inscription or archaeological material mentions Prophet Yunus**, and

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there is no evidence that the shrine on the mound is his tomb. The Qur'an itself does not name Nineveh; the identification of the people of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ with Nineveh comes from tafsir reports. So this eBook mentions Nineveh as the view of the commentators, not as a certain fact.

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Kirkuk Now (2019). German archaeologists unveil artifacts under ruins of Mosul's Nabi Yunus Shrine. https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/60315

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTE: THE STORY OF "JAMES BARTLEY" — NOT INCLUDED

A widely shared story says that a sailor named **James Bartley** was swallowed by a whale near the Falkland Islands in 1891, and was found alive inside its belly.

The historian **Edward B. Davis (1991)** investigated this story and found that the ship ***Star of the East*** was not a whaling ship, that the name James Bartley does not appear in the crew list, and that the captain's wife denied the story. Therefore, **this story is not included**.

The rescue of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ was **a miracle** from Allah: ***"saved him from the distress"*** (21:88).

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Davis, E. B. (1991). A Whale of a Tale: Fundamentalist Fish Stories. Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith 43: 224–237. https://mosaic.messiah.edu/bio_ed/193

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RETURNING TO ALLAH

A prophet left his people in anger, and Allah brought him to the darkest of places. There, he blamed no one. He only said: ***"Lā ilāha illā anta, subḥānaka, innī kuntu minaẓ-ẓālimīn."*** Then Allah saved him, grew a plant to shelter him, chose him, and brought a hundred thousand people to faith.

A BRIEF COMPARISON

THE SITUATION	THE LESSON FROM PROPHET YUNUS
A people who keep on denying	Do not hasten to despair; await the decision of Allah (21:87; 68:48)
Trapped in darkness	Tawhid, glorification and admitting one's fault (21:87)
Unexpected hardship	Remembrance in ease becomes the rescue in hardship (37:143–144)
Coming out weak	Allah provides shelter and provision (37:145–146)
After a fault	Allah chose him and made him of the righteous (68:50)
A people who repented	Repentance before it is too late lifts the punishment (10:98)

LESSONS FROM THIS STORY

First: A prophet's fault does not erase his honour. "And indeed, Jonah was among the messengers" (37:139).

Second: Do not despair of people before Allah decrees. (21:87; 68:48).

Third: The strongest prayer is tawhid and confession. (21:87; Jami' at-Tirmidhi 3505).

Fourth: A promise of rescue for every believer. "And thus do We save the believers" (21:88).

Fifth: Remembrance in ease is provision for hardship. (37:143–144).

Sixth: The door of repentance is open before the punishment falls. (10:98).

Seventh: Do not belittle any prophet. (Sahih al-Bukhari 3413).

Eighth: Taqwa opens a way out from where we do not expect. (65:2–3).

CONCLUSION

Every person will pass through his own "belly of the fish" — moments when every door seems closed, and darkness comes layer upon layer. The story of Yunus عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ teaches that no darkness is too deep for Allah to hear, and no fault is too great to be forgiven when a servant returns to Him honestly.

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May Allah make us among those who remember Him in ease, are patient when tested, and quickly return to Him when we err. ***Lā ilāha illā anta, subḥānaka, innī kuntu minaẓ-ẓālimīn.*** Amin.

In sha Allah, the series **Stories from the Qur'an** continues with the story of Prophet Musa عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ, with the same method: the Qur'an, authentic Hadith, and solid archaeological findings only.

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SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:261

مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنۢبَتَتۡ سَبۡعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنۢبُلَةٖ مِّاْئَةُ حَبَّةٖۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُضَٰعِفُ لِمَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٢٦١

The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/2:261

SURAH SABA' 34:39

قُلۡ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبۡسُطُ ٱلرِّزۡقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ مِنۡ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَقۡدِرُ لَهُۥۚ وَمَآ أَنفَقۡتُم مِّن شَيۡءٖ فَهُوَ يُخۡلِفُهُۥۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ٣٩

Say, "Indeed, my Lord extends provision for whom He wills of His servants and restricts [it] for him. But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] - He will compensate it; and He is the best of providers."

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/34:39

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 2588

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ، وَابْنُ، حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - وَهُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « مَا نَقَصَتْ صَدَقَةٌ مِنْ مَالٍ وَمَا زَادَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا بِعَفْوٍ إِلاَّ عِزًّا وَمَا تَوَاضَعَ أَحَدٌ لِلَّهِ إِلاَّ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Charity does not decrease wealth.

Allah does not increase a servant who forgives except in honour. And no one humbles himself for the sake of Allah except that Allah raises him in rank."

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya bin Ayyub, Qutaibah bin Sa'id and 'Ali bin Hujr, from Isma'il bin Ja'far, from al-'Ala' bin 'Abd al-Rahman, from his father 'Abd al-Rahman bin Ya'qub, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه .

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Virtue, Good Manners and Joining the Ties of Kinship (Kitab al-Birr wa al-Silah wa al-Adab), chapter on the encouragement of forgiveness and humility, Hadith No. 2588.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:2588

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 1631

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ - يَعْنِي ابْنَ سَعِيدٍ - وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - هُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « إِذَا مَاتَ الإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلاَّ مِنْ ثَلاَثَةٍ إِلاَّ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "When a person dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: an ongoing charity, knowledge that is benefited from, or a righteous child who prays for him."

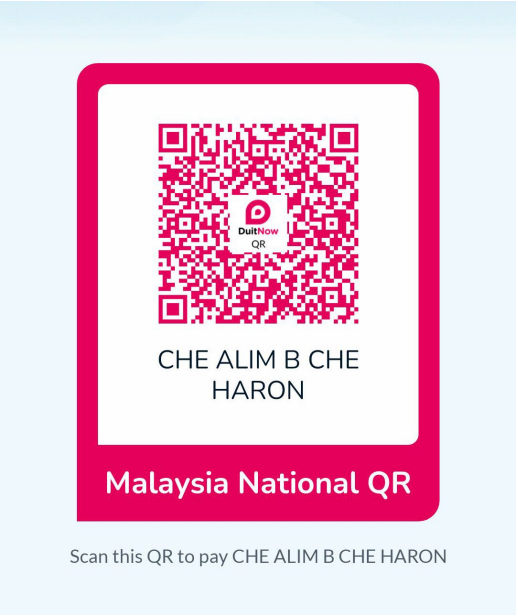
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GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:1631

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