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Thamud?

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## Surah Buruj, Chapter 85

(The Constellations)

Number of Verses: 22

### Contents of the Surah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

#### *In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful*

The early Muslim believers of Mecca lived in turmoil especially at the beginning period of Islam. They were always faced with torture; bodily and spiritually, by the pagan Arabs who forced them to leave their Faith. Some of them, the weak ones, succumbed, but, the stronger ones resisted.

This is a Meccan Surah whose main objective seems to be the spiritual strengthening of the believers against that process, and encouraging them to persevere.

Concerning this point, it tells the story of 'the makers of the pit of fire', those who dug some ditches in which they burnt people for their Faith. They threatened them and burnt them, but the true believers did not lose their Faith.

In another section of the Surah, the pagans are threatened with the blazing fire of Hell for the persecution of Allah's votaries, while the believers are given good news about the gardens of Bliss.

Then, to attract their attention to past generations, it illustrates the story of Pharaoh, the people of Thamud and some other arrogant sects. They lived in such great authority, in the past, that the pagans of Mecca were naught in comparison with them, but they could not stand for Allah's command and perished. Besides, these examples are for soothing the heart of the Prophet (S) and of the believers.

Finally, the Surah ends with an explanation about the greatness and the extraordinary importance of the Holy Qur'an.

On the whole, this is a Surah of resistant perseverance, and patience from the side of the believers against the persecutions of the enemies, amongst which the promise Allah's victory is found.

The name of the Surah is taken from the oath which occurred in the beginning verse of the Surah.

## The Virtue in Studying This Surah

There is a tradition from the Prophet (S) for the virtue of this Surah which says:

*"Allah will give reward for the good-deeds ten times the number of all people gathered in 'Friday Prayer' and all people gathered on the day of 'Arafah (the ninth day of Zilhajj), to the person who studies this Surah. Its recitation saves man from fears."*

These rewards fit in with the content of the Surah and it is obvious when we consider that: one of the commentaries for the verse:

***"By the Witness and the Witnessed"***

is 'Friday' and 'Arafah Day', and that the Surah denotes to the severe perseverance of the early believers against the enemies' persecutions. By the way, it also confirms that these rewards belong to those who study the Surah, then contemplate on it and act accordingly.

## Surah Buruj, Verses 1-9

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

***In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful***

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ

وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ

وَشَاهِدٍ وَمَشْهُودٍ

قُتِلَ أَصْحَابُ الْأُخْدُودِ

النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوُقُودِ

إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ

وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ

وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَن يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

1. "By the Sky full of constellations,"
2. "By the promised Day (of Judgment),"
3. "By the Witness and the Witnessed."
4. "Cursed were the makers of the pit (of fire),"
5. "Of the fuel-fed fire (kept burning),"
6. "When they sat by it,"
7. "And they were witnesses of what they did to the believers."
8. "They were vengeful towards them for no other reason than that they believed in Allah, the Almighty, the Praiseworthy,"
9. "Him, to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is Witness over everything."

## **The Believers and the Pyres**

We know that the believers of Mecca were in terrible trouble, at the beginning, and their enemies did whatever they could to torture them. As it was mentioned earlier, the objective of the revelation of the Surah is to warn these persecutors so that they may consider the destiny of the past tyrannical generations and, on the other hand, it is a soothing message for the early believers of Mecca and a strengthening for their spirits. Furthermore, it is a lesson to Muslims throughout history.

### ***“By the Sky full of constellations”.***

The term /buruj/ is the plural form of /burj/ which originally means 'a castle' or 'a tower'. Some have rendered it to anything that is apparent, manifest or conspicuous, high or elevated; hence /burj/ is applied to a certain kind of structure. Also, /burj/ is used to define an angle of a fortress, or of a surrounding wall of a city, which is more conspicuous; and sometimes a fortress, itself, is called /burj/.

The celestial bodies are either the bright stars of the sky, or the 'constellations', that is, 'a number of fixed stars arbitrarily considered as a group' usually named after some mythological beings that they supposedly resemble an outline, or the broad belt of the constellations marking the twelve Signs of the Zodiac.

Each makes the solar path through the heavens, as we see it, month after month. (Indeed, the sun is rather fixed and the earth rotates round the sun, but, to us it seems to be the contrary.)

Whichever of them the oath is made to, it denotes to its greatness which, perhaps, was not completely known to Arabs at that time, but it is clear to us, today, though it seems that the meaning is 'the bright stars of the sky'.

The holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said, on the commentary of the verse, that:

*"It means the stars."*<sup>1</sup>

### ***“By the promised Day (of Judgement)”***

The appointed Day that all the prophets spoke about and hundreds of verses of the Holy Qur'an warned of.

The Day that

*“Those of old and those of later times.”*

*“All will certainly be gathered together for the meeting appointed for the Day”*<sup>2</sup>,

and the account of all will be made clear.

And, in the third and fourth oaths, it says:

***“By the Witness and the Witnessed.”***

There are many commentaries given on the meaning of the terms /شاهد/ 'witness' and ما شهد/ 'witnessed'.

There are more than thirty, of which the following are the most outstanding:

1. The

***'Witness'***

is the Prophet (S) as Surah Ahzab, No. 33 verse 45 says:

***"O prophet! Truly We have sent you as a Witness, a Bearer of Glad Tidings and a Warner".***

And the

***'Witnessed'***

is the Day of Judgment, as Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 103 says:

***"...that is a Day for which mankind will be gathered together: that will be a Day of Testimony".***

2. The

***'Witness', شاهد,***

is the witnesses to man's deeds like his limbs, as mentioned in Surah Nur, No. 24, verse 24:

***"On the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against them as to their actions".***

And the

***'Witnessed', ما شهد,***

is people and their deeds.

3. The

***'Witness'***

is Friday which is witness to the community of Muslims in the great ceremony of 'Friday Prayers'.

And the

***'Witnessed'***

is 'Arafah Day' when the pilgrims, of Kaaba, are the visitors on that Day (the ninth day of Zilhajj). This very commentary has been narrated from the Prophet, Imam Baqir, and Imam Sadiq (as).<sup>3</sup>

4. The

**'Witness'**

is 'the Feast of Sacrifice', and the

**'Witnessed'**

is 'Arafah Day'.

A narration says that once a man came into the Mosque of the Prophet (S), /masjid-an-nabi/, and saw a person who was reciting traditions of the Prophet (S). He asked him for the commentary of this verse and the person there answered in the affirmative that

**/Ḥadīd/ the 'Witness'**

is Friday and

**/maḥūd/ the 'Witnessed'**

is 'the Feast of Sacrifice Day'. He passed him and saw another person who was also reciting.

Then he asked him about the commentary of the verse and he answered:

**/Ḥadīd/ the 'Witness'**

is Friday and

**/maḥūd/ the 'Witnessed'**

is 'the Feast of Sacrifice Day'. He continued walking, and met a young man who was very handsome and he, too, was narrating traditions from the Prophet (S).

He asked him to tell him about the commentary of the verse and the young man answered:

**/Ḥadīd/ the 'Witness'**

is Muhammad (S) and

**/maḥūd/ the 'Witnessed'**

is the Day of Judgment.

He added:

*"Have you not heard that Allah says:*

***'O Prophet! Truly We have sent you as a Witness, a Bearer of Glad Tidings and a Warner',***

*and have you not also heard that He says:*

***'That is a Day for which mankind will be gathered together: that will be a Day of Testimony'?"***

The writer of this incident says:

*"I asked about the first person and I was answered that it was Ibn-Abbas, the answer for the second person was 'Abdiullah-ibn-'Umar, and the third one was Hassan-ibn-'Ali (as)."*<sup>4</sup>

5. The

***'Witness'***

is 'nights and days', and the

***'Witnessed'***

is 'mankind' whose deeds they witnessed, as it is said from Imam Zayn-al-'abidin (as) in 'the morning and evening supplications':

*"This is a new day which is witness to our deeds. When we do good, it leaves us praiseworthy, and when we do evil, it leaves us scorned."*<sup>5</sup>

6. The

***'Witness'***

is 'angels' and the

***'Witnessed'***

is 'the Qur'an'.

7. The

***'Witness'***

is 'the Black Stone' and the

***'Witnessed'***

is 'the persons who have performed pilgrimage to Mecca' who pass by 'the Black Stone' and touch it.

8. The

**'Witness'**

is people and the

**'Witnessed'**

is Allah.

9. The

**'Witness'**

is the 'Muslim Community', and the

**'Witnessed'**

is other nations, as Surah Baqarah, No. 2, verse 143 says:

***"...that you might be witnesses over the nations".***

10. The

**'Witness'**

is the Prophet of Islam (S) and the

**'Witnessed'**

is other prophets, as Surah Nisa No. 4, verse 41 attests:

***"and We brought you as a witness against these."***

11. Or the

**'Witness'**

is the holy Prophet (S), and the

**'Witnessed'**

is Amir-al-Momineen Ali (as).

Of course, the quality of this verse, in comparison with the previous verses, demands that

### ***/ʿahid/ the 'Witness'***

be the Day of Judgment, whether it be the Prophet of Islam or other prophets over their nations, the angels, man's limbs, and the like; and

### ***/maʿhud/ the 'Witnessed'***

to be mankind or their deeds.

Thus, most of the above mentioned commentaries join and come under one category with a broad sense.

However, the commentaries such as 'Friday', 'Arafah Day', and 'the Feast of Sacrifice Day' are separate from this meaning; though they are also among the witnesses of the Day of Judgment and the witnesses of man's deeds. Each of them, consisting of a large number of people even in this life, metaphorically resembles the Resurrection.

Taking note of the above explanation, it will be obvious that there is no contrast in the mentioned commentaries. All of them may gather in the meaning of the 'witness' and the 'witnessed' in a vast scope. This is one of the signs of the importance of the Holy Qur'an whose meanings are so broad that many different commentaries can be applied to them.

It is because

### ***/ʿahid/ the 'Witness'***

concludes any witness and

### ***/maʿhud/ the 'Witnessed'***

covers anything that can be witnessed. They are mentioned in 'indefinite form', which shows their importance which was explained, definitely, in the above commentaries.

It is noteworthy that there is a delicate relation between these four parts, on the one hand, and the subjects that the oaths are for, on the other hand. The sky and its bright stars and ordered constellations are signs of regularity and account.

### ***'The promised Day (of Judgment)'***

is a definite scene of

### ***'reckoning'***

upon

**'the book'.**

The

**'Witness'**

and the

**'Witnessed'**

are also some means by which reckoning is precisely done. The oaths are for the persecutors to be warned that surely their evil deeds against the believers are recorded and kept for 'the promised Day of Judgment'. And the witnesses around us, from angels, limbs of the body, the days and nights, and the like, are watchful of these deeds and they will bear witness to them on that Day.

Then, after these oaths, it says:

***"Cursed were the makers of the pit (of fire),"***

***"Of the fuel-fed fire (kept burning),"***

***"When they sat by it,"***

***"And they were witnesses of what they did to the believers."***

The term /uxdud/, as Raqib says in his book 'Mufradat', means 'a wide and deep ditch spread on the land', or in other words, the vast pits or trenches are called 'Okhdud' whose plural form is /axadid/ and is basically derived from /xadd/ which means 'a deep trench in the ground, or a pit, a ditch' or the like, dug, or excavated; and originally it is derived from the /xadd/ of man with the sense of 'the part bordering upon the nose, on either side (on the right and on the left where the tears flow when one weeps)'.<sup>1</sup>

It is used metaphorically for the ditches that appear on the surface of the earth; (and later, as an active meaning in practice).

To answer the question of who the makers of the pit of fire were, in which they burnt people for their Faith, and while they were alive; the commentators and historians have delivered some different ideas which will be dealt with under the title of 'Explanation' later. But, it is certain that they had excavated and prepared some deep pits of fire to make the true believers leave their Faith. When the believers persisted, the persecutors threw them into the fire and burnt them alive.

The term /waqud/ basically means a substance by which fire is made (like wood). Any fire needs something, such as wood, and the like to be burnt, but /that-al-waqud/ points to the abundance of fire that they used; then naturally, the resulting fire had been an immense one; and that is why the term has been interpreted to 'burning fire'.

Some authorities think that /waqud/ carries two meanings: one is 'wood' and the other is 'flame'. But, this

idea is not acceptable.

The objective point in the verse:

***"When they sat by it,"***

and the verse after that, is that some pagans were sitting and watching them burning not only indifferent, but, also enjoying it. That was a sign of their utmost hard-heartedness.

Some have also said that these persons were the appointed interrogators and the persecutors of the believers to cause them to leave the true religion.

Still others believe that they were two groups of people: one group was the persecutors and the other was the spectators; and since the spectators were pleased with what the persecutors did, then, this action was attributed to all of them. And, it is natural that in situations like this a group of men are always performers and some others are spectators. Besides, chiefs usually instruct while subordinates obey.

It is also said that there were some people sitting and watching the persecutions to see that the persecutors did not offend their duties and bore witness, before the king, that they had done their duties well.

The combination of these different groups, for the fulfillment of the action, does not seem improbable. Therefore, all of the above mentioned commentaries can be considered together.

At any rate, the form of the verb in the Arabic text denotes that the action was continued for a length of time.

***"They were vengeful towards them for no other reason than that they believed in Allah, the Almighty, the Praiseworthy,"***

Verily, the believers had no fault, but that of their Faith in the True God, Allah. They believed in Allah, the Absolute Perfection, Who is Mighty, and is Worthy of all Praise. Was the belief in such a God a sin, or was the belief in powerless irrational gods?

The term /naqamu/ is derived from /naqam/ which means: 'to devour, to dislike, to reject' by tongue, or by practice through punishment and vengeance.

Surely an action like that is done in great sin, not for the Belief in Allah, Who is exalted in Power and Worthy of all Praise. This makes it clear that how ignorant they were and how low their culture had been that they considered their greatest sin as their greatest pride.

This resembles the idea in Surah A'raf. No.5, verse 126 that sorcerers, after believing in Moses and being threatened with persecution and death by Pharaoh, told him:

***“But thou dost wreak thy vengeance on us simply because we believed in the Signs of our Lord...”***

The terms

***/'aziz/ 'the Almighty'***

and

***/'amid/ 'the praiseworthy'***

are, indeed, a reply to their iniquities and a proof against them. Meanwhile, they are also a threat and warning to all the doers of persecution, throughout history, that Allah, the 'Almighty', and the 'Praiseworthy', keeps watch over them.

Then, talking about two other divine qualities, it says:

***"Him to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is Witness over everything."***

Indeed, these four divine qualities: 'Almighty, (Omnipotent), Praiseworthy, ownership of the kingdom of heavens and the earth, and Omniscient' are of those that establish the propriety of servitude.

Also, it is a glad tidings to the believers that Allah is attentive and watchful over their perseverance and patience in defending Faith, and He sees their sacrifices and devotions. These are the facts that give them power and satisfaction.

On the other hand, they are threats and warnings for their enemies to know that Allah is Mighty but, He leaves them alone in order to examine them; and, at last, they will receive the painful chastisement for their evil deeds.

## **Expbnations**

### **Who Were 'The Makers of The Pit of fire'?**

It was said before that /uxdud/ means 'a wide and deep ditch' and here, it means 'some great pits full of fuel-fed fire prepared by the persecutors for the purpose of burning the believers'.

There is no agreement among the authorities, both commentators and historians, as to the time and place of the incident whether it has been a single event or the happening refers to numerous events similar to that in different parts of the world.

The most famous one is that of Zu-Nuwas, the last Himyrite king of Yemen.

Zu-Nuwas, who was by religion a Jew, named himself Yusef. The members of Himyrite followed him as

Jews. Then, after a length of time, he was informed that a group of people in Najran, a zone in the north of Yemen, were still Christian. His companions compelled him to force the group to be Jewish. He moved to Najran and gathered the inhabitants of the area.

Offering them the Jewish religion, he insisted that they accept it, but they did not. They refused the religion and accepted to suffer death, instead.

Zu-Nuwas ordered his men to dig a large ditch and fill it with wood, then he lit a great fire. Some of them were thrown into it and burnt alive. Some others were killed by the sword and were torn into pieces. Altogether, the number of deaths was about twenty thousand.<sup>6</sup>

It is cited that one of the Christians of Najran fled from the event and went to the Roman Caesar in Rome and asked him for help against Zu-Nuwas.

Caesar replied that Najran was far from his country, but, he would write a letter to the king of Abyssinia, who was a Christian and whose country was neighbouring to the man's, and would ask him to help.

He wrote that letter and demanded that the Abyssinian king to take revenge on that terrible murderer. The man from Najran went to the King, Najashi, who became very saddened when he heard the story of Najran. He felt pity for the extinguishment of the light of Christianity, there, and decided to take revenge.

The Abyssinian army hastened to Yemen and defeated Zu-Nuwas' troops, killing a great many of them. Then, before long, they took Yemen and Najashi ruled it as a state of Abyssinia.<sup>7</sup>

Some commentators have cited that the length of the ditch was 40 cubits and its width was 12 cubits. (A cubit was equal to half a meter. Sometimes, in other places, it was used instead of /gez/ which was a measure for one meter.) Some other commentators have cited that there were seven ditches each of which had been as large as the above mentioned one.

This event has been narrated, differently, in numerous books of commentary and history including *Majma'-al-Bayan* by Tabarsi, *Abul-Futuh Razi's Commentary*, *Tafsir-i-Kabir* by Fakhr-i-Razi, *Ruh-al-Ma'ali* by Aloosi, *Qartabi's Commentary*, *Sirah* by Ibn- Hosham, and many others.

As it was mentioned before, the cruel persecutors were finally punished in this world and were revenged for the murders they had committed. The punishment of blazing fire in the Hereafter is waiting for them, too.

These 'crematoriums', which were made by those Jews, are said to be probably the first ones in history. But, it is surprising that this very cruel innovation was used against the Jews, themselves, and, as it is known, many Jews were burnt in crematoriums, on Hitler's orders, in Germany; and the example of the 'Punishment of the Burning Fire' happened to them even in this world.

In addition to this, Zu-Nuwas, the main establisher of this horrible innovation, himself, was not safe from

his evil deeds.

The above lines about 'the makers of the pit of fire' are according to popular attitudes, but there are also other narrations which say that 'the makers of the pit of fire' were not only those in Yemen at the time of Zu-Nuwas, but in other locations and at different times. Commentators have cited up to ten narrations about them.

A narration that has been cited from Amir-al-Motmineen Ali (as) says:

*“And the Magi had a 'Book' and they acted according to their Holy Book. One of their kings married with his sister and the woman wanted him to announce that marriage with ones' sister' is lawful, but his people did not accept this. So, the king had some of the believing people, who opposed his instruction, thrown into a pit of fire.”*<sup>8</sup>

This is about 'the makers of the pit of fire' in Fars (Old Persia, i.e. Iran). There is a citation about 'the makers of the pit of fire' in Sham, as well, where there lived some believing people who were burnt in a pit of fire by Antiyakhus.<sup>9</sup>

Some have also referred this event to the companions of Daniel, the famous prophet of the Israelites who are mentioned in the book of Daniel from the Torah, and Tha'labi has applied 'the makers of the pit of fire', in Fars, to them.<sup>10</sup>

It is not improbable that 'the makers of the pit of fire' includes all of them, although the most famous example of it is the story of Zu-Nuwas in Yemen.

### **Resistance in Keeping Faith**

There are numerous examples, in history, of people who suffered fatal persecutions for their beliefs. They agreed, eagerly, to be killed but, did not leave their Faith. History has so many stories of this kind: some of the Faithful were hanged, some were murdered by the sword, and some were burnt to death.

The story of 'asiya, Pharaoh's wife, is well known. She was persecuted terribly for her Faith to Moses, the son of 'Imran, so much so that she died because of the torture.

A narration from Amir-al-Momineen Ali (as) says:

*"Allah appointed a man to prophethood from among the people of Abyssinia for them, but they refused him. They fought against him and his followers in which, finally, some of the prophet's votaries were killed and some others were captured and kept along with the prophet himself as captives.*

*Then they prepared a ditch full of blazing fire, and called people to come beside it. They commanded that any of them who followed the same religion as theirs could go aside and those who believed in the prophet's religion and that of his votaries should throw themselves into the fire. The prophet's followers,*

who could do nothing, bravely threw themselves into the fire. They outran each other (as if in a competition).

Then, at that moment there came a woman carrying a one-month-old baby. She went to throw herself into the fire but suddenly her motherly affection stopped her. Then the little baby called her and said:

'Do not fear, Mother, throw yourself and me both. By Allah, surely this is a little thing on the path of Allah...'

And this baby was one of those who spoke in the cradle." 11

This story tells us that there had been another example of

**'the makers of the pit of fire'**

in Abyssinia.

The story of 'Ammar-Yasir's parents and some others, like them, in addition to the story of Imam Hosain and his companions who proceeded to be killed as martyrs, are famous in Islamic history.

In our time, we ourselves, have seen or have heard many examples of young and old people who willingly wished to be martyred for the sake of their Faith and religion. Then, as a conclusion, it should be said that the existence of the Divine religions, in the past and present, depended on these devotions and martyrdoms.

## Surah Buruj, Verses 10-16

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ  
الْحَرِيقِ

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۚ ذَلِكَ  
الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ

إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ

أِنَّهُ هُوَ يَبْدِي وَيُعِيدُ

وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ

ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ

فَعَّالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ

10. ***"Surely (as for) those who persecute (or draw into temptation) believing men and believing women, yet repent not, for them is the punishment of Hell and for them is the punishment of the Burning Fire."***
11. ***"Surely (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, for them are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, that is the great salvation, (the fulfillment of all desires),"***
12. ***"Surely the Grip of thy Lord is severe."***
13. ***"It is He Who creates (everything) from the very beginning and causes to return,"***
14. ***"And He is All-forgiving, All-loving,"***
15. ***"Lord of the 'Arsh (Throne), the Glorious,"***
16. ***The Doer of whatever He wills."***

## **Allah's Punishment for the Persecutors**

After describing, in the former verses, the terrible persecutions carried out by some past generations who burnt the resisting believers, in the following verses it points to the grievous punishment of Allah, for them, in contrast with the great rewards for the believers.

The warning is quite clear:

***"Surely (as for) these who persecute (or draw into temptation) believing men and believing women, yet repent not, for them is the punishment of Hell and for them is the punishment of the Burning Fire."***

The term /fatanu/ is derived from /fatn/ which originally means 'to try or prove' (as gold in the fire to ascertain its purity), then the term is used in the sense of examination and persecution (by burning) or both. It is also used with the meaning of either punishment or leading into temptation.

In this verse, it is used with the meaning of 'punishment and penalty', similar to Surah Zariyat, No. 51, verses 13–14 which say:

***"(It will be) a Day when they will be tried (and tested) over the Fire!"***  
***"Taste ye your trial! this is what ye used to ask to be hastened!"***

The words

***'yet repent not',***

in the verse, shows that it is possible for the persecutors to repent, and this signifies the highest Mercy of Allah to the sinners. In the meantime, it warns the pagans of Mecca to leave off with the persecuting of the believers and return to the way of Allah before it is too late.

In principal, the Qur'an does not close the door of repentance on anyone. Then, it can be understood that the settlement of the painful punishments are for the improvement of the sinners and returning them to the way of Allah as a consequence.

It is noteworthy that there are two kinds of distinguishing chastisements, mentioned in the verse for the persecutors: the first is

***'the punishment of Hell',***

and the second is

***'the punishment of the Blazing Fire'.***

The case is, perhaps, for the reason that there are many kinds of punishment in Hell, one of which is 'the Blazing Fire' and it is especially mentioned for those persecutors who burnt the believers of Mecca with fire and should be punished with Fire on That Day. But, how different these two kinds of fire are!

Some commentators have cited that

***'the punishment of Hell'***

is for their

***'disbelieving'***

and

***'the punishment of the Blazing Fire'***

is for their deeds of persecuting others.

Then, paying attention to the rewards of the Righteous, it says:

***“Surely (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, for them are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, that is the great salvation, (the fulfillment of all desires)”.***

What a great Salvation! What can be better or higher than being the Nearest to Allah, honourably, in the midst of the Gardens of Bliss, the Etemal blessings? But, it should be noted that the essential means of obtaining this 'great Salvation' is 'Belief and doing good deeds'.

The phrase

***'amal-us-salihat/ 'do good-deeds'***

denotes that a mere good action, or a few of them done temporarily, are not enough, but good deeds must be done continuously by the believers.

The term

***/thalikal 'that',***

in Arabic, is generally used for pointing to something or someone that is in the distance. But, here it is used to show importance and highness, then it means that their 'great Salvation' is so important and high that imagination cannot touch it.

Then, threatening the pagans once more, it says:

***“Surely the Grip of the Lord is severe.”***

So, it emphasizes that one should not think that there is no Hereafter and that one does not return to life again.

Nay, it says:

***“It is He Who creates (everything) from the very beginning, and causes it to return”.***

The term /bataṣṣa/ means 'to take or seize by force' and since this action is the cause of punishment, then it is used in the sense of 'chastisement'.

The term

***/rabbikal 'your Lord'***

is for soothing the Prophet (S) and is an emphasis on Allah's support for him.

It is noteworthy to mention that there are five emphases concentrated on here:

1. The term /bataḡa/, meaning 'to take by force', contains the connotation of severity.
2. A noun–phrase is usually used for emphasis.
3. The term

***/ḡadid/ 'severe',***

itself.

4. The word

***linnal 'surely'.***

5. The Arabic letter 'lam' (ل), used in cases like this, is also used for emphasis, here.

Therefore, the Holy Qur'an threatens them precisely about the punishment. And the sentence:

***"It is He Who creates (everything) from the very beginning, and causes it to return"***

is an evidence for the Resurrection which can be counted as another emphasis, added to the above ones.

Then, five qualities of the divine attributes are mentioned. It says:

***"And He is All-forgiving, All-loving,"***

***"Lord of the Throne, the Glorious,"***

***"The Doer of whatever He wills."***

The terms

***lqafur/ (All-forgiving),***

and

***lwadud/ (All-loving)***

both are 'of the utmost amplification' which refer to the extreme forgiveness and love of Allah: He is 'forgiving' of the sins of those sinners who repent, and is 'Loving' to the servants who are good-doers.

In fact, these divine attributes are mentioned to be added to the threats given in the former verses to illustrate the fact that the sinners can repent and be forgiven because, while Allah is strict in punishment, He is

***'All-forgiving'***

and

### **'All-loving'**

The term /wadud/ has the sense of being in the subjective case, which fits the other attribute, i.e. 'All-forgiving'.

The third attribute is

### **/zul-'arsh/ 'Lord of the Throne ('Arsh)'**

And 'Arsh, which means 'Royal throne', in such cases, refers metaphorically to power and Sovereignty. This touches on the fact that the rulership of all creatures is His, and Allah's Will is, itself, the Word and the Deed. There is no interval between them. No circumstance whatever can come between His Will and the execution thereof. Therefore, it is quite easy for Him to call the dead to life, again, and punish the persecutors and the oppressors.

The term /majid/ is derived from /majd/ which means 'to excel in glory' which is used only for Allah as a quality.

The association of these five Divine attributes are clear, because Allah is All-forgiving and All-loving under the absolute Power (Omnipotence), Graciousness and with His Will so that nothing can stop Him, no one is able to confront Him, nor does His Will fade.

## **Surah Buruj, Verses 17-22**

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ

فِرْعَوْنَ وَثَمُودَ

بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبٍ

وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَّجِيدٌ

فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ

17. ***"Has the story reached thee, of the Forces"***
18. ***"Of Pharaoh and (the tribe of) Thamud?"***
19. ***"And yet the unbelievers (persist) in rejecting (the Truth)!"***
20. ***"But Allah encompasses them from every point!"***
21. ***"Nay! it is a glorious Qur'an,"***
22. ***"(Inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved!"***

### **Did You See What Happened to the Forces of Pharaoh and the Tribe of Thamud?**

The previous verses were about the Absolute Power of Allah and His Sovereignty with some threats for the unbelieving persecutors.

Then, to make it clear that these threats are not a mere statement and they are practicable, in the next verses it addresses the Prophet (S) and says:

***"Has the story reached thee, of the Forces"***

These forces are some large and great troops which fought against Allah's prophets in the past, but all of them perished.

Then two examples of the forces are mentioned: one of them is very ancient, and the other was not so ancient then.

It says:

***"Of Pharaoh and (the tribe of) Thamud?"***

These peoples were those who governed throughout of the world at their time from east to west. Some of them exploited the stable stone of the mountains and built splendid houses and castles with them, so that there were no other people who could match them, in those times.

But Allah destroyed them all. Pharaoh was a proud monarch of a powerful kingdom, with resources and organization, material, moral, and intellectual, as good as any in the world. When he pitted himself against Allah's Prophet, he and his forces were destroyed through water in the Nile.

The 'Thamud', a very old generation, were great builders, and had a high standard of material civilization.

But, they defied the law of Allah and perished in a dreadful earthquake and cold terrible storms, which threw them prone on the ground and buried them with their fine buildings. These two factors, water and wind, were of the main necessities of life, but they worked as the means of their inevitable destruction.

Pharaoh and Thamud are two examples who were both very powerful; chosen from all past arrogant generations. They are selected because the Arab pagans knew their names and were partly familiar with their history.

Then, in the next verse, it says:

***“And yet the unbelievers (persist) in rejecting (the Truth).”***

Truth is obvious to all, but the arrogant ones do not follow the 'Way' and do not obey the 'Right'.

The term

***/ball/ 'and yet'***

is used, here, for varying the matter and saying that these pagans are as if they are worse than Pharaoh and the tribe of Thamud from the point of arrogance and rejecting the verses of Qur'an. They used all possible means to gain their goal.

So, they should know that:

***"But Allah encompasses them from every point!"***

and they are all always within His grasp.

If Allah leaves them alone for a while, it is not due to inability, and if He does not punish them immediately, it is not because they are out of His reach.

The term

***/wara-'i-him/ 'from behind'***

points to the sense that they are encompassed by the Divine forces, not only in conditions that they foresee but from a variety of unexpected directions; and cannot escape from Justice and Penalty.

It is also probable that it points to the Knowledge of Allah in regard to their deeds, so much so that none of their words, behaviour, and thoughts are hidden from Him.

Then, pointing to the vanity of their persistence in rejecting the Qur'an and their claim that it was magic, or poetry it says:

***"Nay! it is a glorious Qur'an. (Inscribed) in a Table! Preserved!"***

It will remain safe and unchanged from the hands of the Wicked, the Satans, and the Soothsayers. Therefore, O Prophet (S)! pay no attention if they call you a poet, or sorcerer, or soothsayer, or even mad. Do not be worried.

Your support is Mighty and your Way is clear. As it was mentioned before, the term /majid/ is derived from /majd/ which means 'to excel in glory' and is completely appropriate for the Qur'an, because its contents are broad and glorious and its meaning is vast and exalted both about Divine theology, and ethical morals, as well as religious laws.

The term /lauh/ means 'a broad tablet to write on', while /louh/ means 'thirst', and also: 'atmosphere'.

The verb, derived from the former, means 'appear and glitter'. But the word is used here in the sense of 'the Tablet on which the Holy Qur'an is inscribed and is preserved'. It, of course, does not mean the ordinary tablets that we use.

It is cited in a commentary from Ibn-Abbas that the length of 'the Preserved Tablet' is as long as the distance between the sky and the earth, and its width is as long as the distance between East and West.

Hence, it seems that 'the Preserved Tablet' is the very Knowledge of Allah, which encompasses all the world and is safe from any distortion and alteration.

Surely, the Qur'an originates from the endless knowledge of Allah, and is neither from man's thought, nor a production from the Satans. Its content, itself, proves this fact.

This is probably the same thing that the Holy Qur'an has called

***/kitab-un-mubin /'a Record Clear'***

and sometimes

***'Umm-ul-Kitab' 'the Mother of the Book'***,

as Surah Ra'd, No. 13, verse 39 says:

***"Allah doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book".***

And in Surah An'am, No. 6, verse 99 it says:

***"...nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in a Record Clear (to those who can read)".***

It should also be noted that this is the only situation in 'the Holy Qur'an' in which the term 'the Preserved Tablet' has occurred.

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1. Durr-ul-manthur, vol. 6, p. 331
  2. Surah Waqi'ah, No. 56, verses 49-50
  3. Majma.-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 466.
  4. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 543.
  5. Sahifah-Sajjadiyah, Sixth Supplication.
  6. Tafsir-i- 'Ali-'bn-Ibrahim-Qummi, vol. 2, p. 414.
  7. Qisas-i-Qur'an, Balaqi, p. 288.
  8. A'lam-i-Qur'an, p. 137-138.
  9. Ibid.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Tafsir-i- Ayashi; narrated in Al-Mizan, vol. 20, p. 377.

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