

## Surah Zilzal, Chapter 99

(The Quaking)

Number of Verses: 8

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

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

Opinions are divided as to whether this Surah was revealed in Mecca or Medina. It is generally referred to as being of the early Medinan period, by some commentators, while some others believe that it can be of the late Meccan period.

The style of its verses, which are about Resurrection and the preliminary signs of its occurrence, appears to be like the Meccan Suras, but there is a tradition which says that when this Surah was revealed, Abu-Sa'id-Khudri asked the holy Prophet (S) a question about the following verse:

***"So, whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall behold it",***

and we know that Abu-Sa'id joined the Muslims in Medina. [1](#)

In any case, whether it is Meccan or Medinan, it does not change the meaning and the commentary of the Surah.

This Surah mainly pivots on three points: First, it speaks about the preliminary signs of the appearance of the Hereafter, and then, it tells us about the Earth as a witness to all of Man's deeds.

In the third part, people are divided into two groups; good and evil, each of which will receive the fruit of their own actions.

## The Virtue in Studying this Surah

There are some expressive meanings in the Islamic reports on the virtue of reciting this Surah.

For instance, a tradition from the holy Prophet (S) says:

*"He who recites it (Surah Zilzal), it is the same as if he had recited Surah Baqarah, his reward is as much as the one who would have recited one fourth of the Qur'an."*<sup>2</sup>

Another tradition from Imam Sadiq (as) says:

*"Be never tired of reciting it (Surah Zilzal), because everyone who recites it in his optional prayers will never be involved in an earthquake and he will not die by it, nor should he be hurt by lightning or any worldly pests until he dies."*<sup>3</sup>

## Surah Zilzal, Verses 1-8

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

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

اِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْاَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا

وَاُخْرِجَتِ الْاَرْضُ سُوءَ اَنْفَالِهَا

وَقَالَ الْاِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ اَخْبَارَهَا

بَانَ رَبُّكَ اَوْحَىٰ لَهَا

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ اُسْتَاتًا لِّیُرَوْا اَعْمَالَهُمْ

فَمَنْ یَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَیْرًا یَرَهُ

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

1. ***"When the Earth shall quake with a mighty quaking."***
2. ***"And the Earth shall cast forth her burdens,"***
3. ***"And man shall say (distressed): What has befallen her?"***
4. ***"On That Day, she will recount (all) her news:"***
5. ***"For that your Lord will have given her inspiration."***
6. ***"On That Day, people shall come forth in groups to be shown their deeds."***
7. ***"So, whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall behold it."***
8. ***"And whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall behold it."***

### **The Day When Man Sees All His Deeds**

As it was pointed out about the contents of the Surah, the beginning of the Surah refers to the horrible end of the phenomenal world and some terrible signs it has before the Resurrection befalls.

At first, it says:

***"When the Earth shall quake with a mighty quaking,"***  
***"And the Earth shall cast forth her burdens,"***

The term

***/zilzalaha/ 'her earthquake'***

points either to the idea that, on that day, all the globe will quake (this is different from the ordinary earthquakes that we know of which are local and periodical), or to the promised earthquake, that is, the final earthquake of the Resurrection.

Commentators have delivered different ideas on the term

***/athqall/ 'burdens'***

Some have said that the purpose of using it so signify men who will be thrown out from their graves by the quake of the Resurrection, like that which is found in Surah Inshiqaq, No. 84, verse 4 which says:

***"And casts forth what is within it and becomes empty."***

Some others have said the purpose is that it cast out the minerals and treasures from within the earth which causes the mammonists to sigh for them.

It is also probable that it means some enormous boulders and lava, from beneath the crust of the earth, which are usually thrown up when earthquakes and volcanoes occur. At the end of this world and

through the great and final convulsion, whatever is inside the earth will be thrown out.

The first commentary seems more appropriate, though all of them can be combined, as well.

However, on That Day everyone, observing that supreme world-shaking Event, will become completely terrified

***"And man shall say (distressed): What had befallen her?"***

Some have rendered

***'man'***,

here to mean the unbelieving men, in particular, who had doubt about the Resurrection. But it seems that the word 'man' has a vast meaning, here so that it includes all human beings, because the situation of the earth, on That Day, will be so surprising that everyone will wonder, so it is not limited to the unbelievers, alone.

Does this surprise and question thereby depend on whether it is the First or the Second Blast?

The circumstances will show that it is the First Blast, of the end of this world, because the Great world-shaking Event happens at that time.

However, it has been presumed that it refers to the second Blast and the raising of the dead when all people come out from beneath the earth. The later verses are all about the Second Blast, too.

But, since the events of these two blasts are frequently seen together, in the verses of Qur'an, the first commentary, regarding the terrible final earthquake, seems more fitting.

If so the use of the term

***/athqall 'burdens'***

is in reference to minerals, treasures and molten lava hidden in the earth.

More important than this is that:

***"On That Day, she will recount (all) her news"***.

On the Day of Judgement, the earth will manifest all good and evil deeds that were carried out on it. This very earth, on which we live and do our actions, is one of the greatest witnesses to Man's deeds on That Day.

There is a tradition from the holy Prophet (S) who asked:

*"Do you know what the purpose of*

***'her news'***

*is?"*

the people replied that Allah and His Messenger are more informed.

Then, he added:

***"Her news'***

*is that she is witness to all the deeds that every servant has done on her surface. She will say: So and so had done such and such on a particular day.*

*And this is*

***'her news'".***[4](#)

In another tradition the holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said:

*"Be careful of your ablution; and the best action of your deeds is prayer. Then, protect the earth, because she is your mother; and there is no one on her who does good or evil, but that she reports it."*[5](#)

Abu-Sa'id-Khudri has narrated that when they were in the desert they would call to prayer, loudly, because he had heard from the Messenger of Allah (S) who said:

*"There is no Jinn or human or stone that hears it, but does not bear witness to it (on the Day of Judgement)."*[6](#)

Does the Earth really speak by the command of Allah? Or, is the purpose that the effects of Man's deeds appear on the face of the earth?

We know that every action which Man does has an effect on his surroundings even though they are not tangible for us, but they all will be made manifest on That Day and the Earth speaking is not anything save one example of this great manifestation.

In any event, this is not a strange matter because, even today with the development of science and Man's experiments, there are inventions that can record the voice of people or take photos and films of the actions that anyone does, at any time or anywhere and which can be kept as proper documents to be offered to the court in a form that no one can deny or reject.

It is worthy to note that Hazrat Ali (as) is narrated to have said:

*"Say your prayers at different points in the Mosques, because on the Day of Judgement every part will*

*bear witness for the one who has prayed thereon".<sup>7</sup>*

Another tradition denotes that when Hazrat Ali (as) finished the act of dividing the public treasury of the Muslims, he used to say a two-rak'at prayer and then said (addressing the place):

*"On the Day of Judgement bear witness for me that verily I ruled you justly and emptied you rightfully."<sup>8</sup>*

In the next verse, it says:

***"For that your Lord will have given her inspiration."***

And the Earth obeys this command fully. The term /auha/ is used, here to indicate the extent of the divine revelation and that even the earth shall have some sort of receiving the revelation by which she will be able to speak or it is contrary to the nature of the earth to speak.

Some have said that the purpose is that He inspires the Earth to cast out what she has written, herself.

But, the first commentary seems more correct and more appropriate.

Then, it says:

***"On That Day, people shall come forth in groups to be shown their deeds"***

The term /astat/ is the plural form of /satt/ with the meaning of 'scattered fragments', the separation and diversity of people may be for that on the Day of Judgement the followers of different religions will arrive separately; or the people of every part of the earth will come by themselves; or some people will appear with beautiful, happy faces and some others with dark, frowning, dull faces.

Or, all sects are with their leaders as is pointed out in Surah Asra, No. 17, verse 71:

***"One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imams..."***

Or, the believers with the believers and the disbelievers with the disbelievers will come forth on the Day of Judgement.

To combine these commentaries, together, is also quite possible, because the meaning of the verse is vast.

The term /yasdur/ is derived from /sadr/ and means 'camels excitingly coming out of the watering place, in groups', and here it refers to 'different sects coming out of their graves for their reckoning'.

The purpose of the phrase

***//iyarau-a'malahum/ 'to be shown their deeds'***

is that they will see the outcome of their deeds.

Or, they will see the record of the deeds in which every action, good or bad, is recorded.

Or, it refers to the esoteric observation with the sense of knowing the quality of their deeds.

Or, it means the embodiment of deeds and observing the deeds, themselves.

The last commentary adapts to the appearance of the verse most of all. This verse is considered the most clear, among the verses, on the matter of 'the embodiment of deeds' which on That Day men's deeds are incarnated in their forms and appear in front of every individual. This correlation with deeds causes Man to be joyful or afflicted according to the various levels of his merits and demerits.

Then, the fate of these two groups, believers and disbelievers, good-doers and evildoers, are pointed out, saying:

***"So, whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall behold it"***

***"And whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall behold it."***

Again, there are different commentaries cited as to whether the person shall see the outcome of his deeds or whether he shall see the record of the deeds or the deeds, themselves.

The appearance of these verses emphasizes again on the embodiment of deeds and seeing the deeds, themselves, good or evil, on the Day of Judgement even for the slightest one.

The term /mithqal/ means both 'weight, heaviness' and 'a scale' by which the weight of things are weighed, and here the first meaning is used.

Commentators have rendered the word /tharrah/ differently, such as: 'a small ant', 'the dust that sticks on the hand when one puts it on the ground'; or particles of dust floating in the air that are seen when a beam of sunlight shines through an opening into a dark room.

We know that, nowadays, the word /tharrah/ is also used in the Arabic language for 'atom' and 'atomic bomb' is called /qunbulatun tharriyah/.

Furthermore, an atom is a tiny particle of anything; or any of the smallest particles of an element that combine with similar particles of other elements to produce compounds: Atoms combine to form molecules and consist of a complex arrangement of electrons revolving around a positively charged nucleus containing (except for hydrogen) protons and neutrons and other particles.

In any case, whatever it means, the purpose, here is the smallest weight.

However, this verse is one of the verses that shakes Man and shows that the account of Allah, on That Day, is extraordinarily proper and sensitive, and the scales for weighing Man's deeds are so delicate and

just that they count the smallest weight of his actions.

### Explanation: Accuracy and Severity at the Divine Reckoning

Not only the verses of this Surah, but, also different verses of the Qur'an clearly show that on the Day of Judgement the Reckoning is extremely precise. Surah Luqman, No. 31, Verse' 16 says:

***"O my son!" (said Luqman), 'If there be (but) the weight of a mustard seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, Allah will bring it forth: For Allah understands the finest mysteries, (and) is well acquainted (with them).'"***

Mustard is a small seed from a famous plant and it is proverbially a small, minute thing that people may ordinarily pass by.

These senses warn Man of the strictness which he will be dealt with in accounting for his deeds. Even the smallest deed, good or evil, will not escape the accounting. By the way, these verses warn us not to think that lesser sins are unimportant nor the good actions, insignificant. Whatever Allah counts cannot be considered unimportant.

That is why some commentators have said that these verses were revealed when some of the followers of the holy Prophet (S) were heedless of little acts of charity and used to say that the reward is given for the things which we like and little things are not among those that we like. They were heedless of the lesser sins, too. These verses were revealed and encouraged them to do even the little acts of charity and to admonish them about small vices...

### An Answer to a Question

A question arises, here as to whether, according to these verses, Man will see all his deeds, good or evil, small or great on the Day of Judgement. How does this idea adapt with the verses about the good deeds cancelling the bad ones (or vice-versa), excommunication, forgiveness, and repentance?

The verses of cancellation say that some actions and beliefs like blasphemy destroy all the good actions of Man, for example: Surah Zumar, No. 39, verse 65 says:

***"...If you were to join (gods with God), truly fruitless will be thy work (in life)..."***

And based on the verses of excommunication, sometimes

***"...good actions remove those that are evil..."***<sup>9</sup>

Also, the verses of forgiveness and repentance say that with the forgiveness by Allah and repentance by Man, sins will be obliterated. Then, how do these senses match with the seeing of all good and evil deeds in the Hereafter?

To answer this question we must pay attention to the fact that the idea mentioned in these verses is that 'whoever has done an atom's weight of good or evil shall behold it' is a general rule, and we know that there are exceptions to most rules and the verse of forgiveness, repentance, cancellation, and excommunication are, in fact, exceptions to this general rule.

Another answer is that in the cases of 'cancellation' and 'excommunication', indeed, there occurs a balance and division, just like 'claims' and 'debts' that are reduced from each other. When Man sees the remaining balance, he has, indeed, seen all his good and bad actions. This word is also true about forgiveness and repentance, because forgiveness does not happen without it not being worthy of the case, and repentance is, itself, one of the good actions.

The appearance of the verses shows that they refer to the actions of this world and the fruit of them in the Next World.

### **The Most Expressive Verses of the Qur'an**

It is narrated from 'Abdillah ibne Mas'ud that the most decisive verses of the Holy Qur'an are those very verses that say:

***"So, whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall behold it."***

***"And whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall behold it".***

He has rendered them to mean 'consistent'. and verily, the true belief in their contents is enough to bring Man on the right path and keeps him far from committing any vice and corruption.

There is a tradition which says that once a man came to the holy Prophet (S) and asked him to teach him something from what Allah had taught him. The holy Prophet (S) sent him to one of his followers to teach him the Qur'an. He taught the man Surah Zilzal to the end. Then, the man was ready to leave saying that that was sufficient for him.

(Another narration has cited that he said:

*'That very verse alone was sufficient for him').*

The holy Prophet (S) said:

*"Let him go since he became a scholar."*

(And according to another narration he said:

*"He returned as a scholar.")*[10](#)

The reason is clear because, he who knows his deeds will be counted later, even those that are as small as a mustard seed, will pay careful attention to his actions today; and this is the best lesson to train him.

Furthermore, on the Day of Judgement one good action will be counted ten to seven hundred times as much for those that Allah wills, while one sin will be counted as only one for divine punishment; and Allah is forgiving.

## Supplication

*O Lord! When Your Messenger, with that great rank he has, is hopeful only to Your forgiveness, our condition is obvious.*

*O Lord! Our good deeds are naught to save us, but happy is when Your Grace comes forth to help!*

*O Lord! On the Day when all deeds, good and evil, will be embodied in front of us, we hope for Your profound Favor alone.*

- [1.](#) Ruh-al- Ma'ani. Vol 30 B p. 208
- [2.](#) Majma'-al-Bayan, vol, 10, p, 524
- [3.](#) Usul-Kafi as narrated in Nur-uth- Thaqalayn, vol, 5, p, 347
- [4.](#) Nur-uth- Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 649.
- [5.](#) Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 526.
- [6.](#) Ibid.
- [7.](#) Li'a1-il-Akhbar, vol. 5, p 79 (New edition) ,
- [8.](#) Ibid,
- [9.](#) Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 114
- [10.](#) Tafsir-i-Ruh-ul-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 495 and Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, vol. 5. p. 650.

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