

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 103
SURAH AL-'ASR

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

www.quran.live

HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

103

SURAH AL-'ASR

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Introduction and Summary

This early Makkan Surah refers to the testimony of Time through the ages. All history shows that Evil came to an evil end. But Time is always in favour of those who have Faith, live clean and pure lives, and know how to wait, in patience and constancy. Cf. the theme of S.95.

C.283 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Waste not, nor misuse, your life. Time
Through the Ages bears witness that nothing remains*

*But Faith and Good Deeds, and the teaching of Truth
And the teaching of Patience and Constancy.
But for these, Man against Time is in loss!*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَالْعَصْرُ (١)

1. By (the Token of) **time** (through the Ages),

C6262. Al-Asr may mean:

1. Time through the Ages, or long periods, in which case it comes near to the abstract idea of Time, **Dahr**;
2. or the late afternoon, from which the **Asr** canonical prayer takes its name (see n. 271 to 2:238).

An appeal is made to Time as one of the creations of Allah, of which everyone knows something but of which no one can fully explain the exact significance.

Time searches out and destroys everything material. No one in secular literature has expressed the tyranny of "never-resting Time" better than Shakespeare in his Sonnets.

For example, see Sonnets 5 ("never-resting Time"), 12 ("Nothing against Time's scythe can make defence"), and 64 ("When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced The rich proud cost of outworn buried age").

If we merely run a race against Time, we shall lose. It is the spiritual part of us that conquers Time. See verse 3 below.

For the "afternoon" idea see next note.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ (٢)

2. Verily Man is in loss,

C6263. If life be considered under the metaphor of a business bargain, man, by merely attending to his material gains, will lose. When he makes up his day's account in the afternoon, it will show a loss.

It will only show profit if he has Faith, leads a good life, and contributes to social welfare by directing and encouraging other people on the Path of Truth and Constancy.

إِنَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ...

3. Except such as have

- Faith, and do righteous deeds,

C6264. Faith is his armour, which wards off the wounds of the material world; and his righteous life is his positive contribution to spiritual ascent.

... وَتَوَّاصُوا بِالْحَقِّ ...

- and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth,

C6265. If he lived only for himself, he would not fulfil his whole duty. Whatever good he has, especially in moral and spiritual life, he must spread among his brethren, so that they may see the Truth and stand by it in patient hope and unshaken constancy amidst all the storm and stress of outer life.

For he and they will then have attained Peace within.

... وَتَوَّاصُوا بِالصَّبْرِ (٣)

- and of Patience and Constancy.