

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 89
SURAH AL-FAJR

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
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HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

089

SURAH AL-FAJR

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Introduction and Summary

This is one of the earliest of the Surahs to be revealed--- probably within the first ten chronological order.

Its mystic meaning is suggested by contrasts in nature and in man's long history. Thus does it enforce the lesson of Faith in the Hereafter to "those who understand". Man's history and legendry lore show that greatness does not last and the proudest are brought low. For enforcing moral and spiritual truths, the strictest history is no better than legend. Indeed all

artistic history is legend, for it is written from a special point of view.

Man is easily cowed by the contrasts in his own fortunes, and yet he does not learn from them the lesson of forbearance and kindness to others, and the final elevation of goodness in the Hereafter. When all the things on which his mind and heart are set on this earth shall be crushed to nothingness, he will see the real glory and power, love and beauty, of Allah, for these are the light of the Garden of Paradise.

C.269 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Man is apt to forget the contrasts
In nature and life, and all that they mean
In his spiritual growth. Perchance his mind
Is so absorbed in what he sees,
That he doubts the vast Realities
He does not see. The Present makes
Him blind to the Past and to the Future.
Fooled by glory, he fears not a fall:
And baulked in disaster, he gives up Hope
And sometimes Faith. Let him study
Nature, and History, and restore his Faith:
Realising the Sure Event, the Hereafter,
Let him find his fullest fulfilment
In the service and the good pleasure of Allah!*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَالْفَجْرُ (۱)

1. By the Break of Day,

C6108. Four striking contrasts are mentioned, to show Allah's Power and Justice, and appeal to "those who understand".

The first is the glory and mystery of the Break of Day. It just succeeds the deepest dark of the Night, when the first rays of light break through. Few people except those actually in personal touch with nature can feel its compelling power.

In respect both of beauty and terror, of hope and inspiration, of suddenness and continuing increase of light and joy, this "holy time" of night may well stand as the type of spiritual awakening from darkness to Faith, from Death to Resurrection.

وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ (٢)

2. By the Nights twice five;

C6109. By the Ten Nights are usually understood the first ten nights of *Dhu al Hijjah*, the sacred season of Pilgrimage.

From the most ancient times Makkah was the centre of Arab pilgrimage. The story of Abraham is intimately connected with it: see 2:125-127 and notes, also n. 217 to 2:197.

In times of Paganism various superstitions were introduced, which Islam swept away. Islam also purified the rites and ceremonies, giving them new meaning.

The ten days specially devoted to the Hajj introduce a striking contrast in the life of Makkah and of the pilgrims. Makkah, from being a quiet secluded city, is then thronged with thousands of pilgrims from all parts of the world. They discard their ordinary dress-representing every kind of costume-to the simple and ordinary *Ihram* (n. 217); they refrain from every kind of fighting and quarrel; they abstain from every kind of luxury and self-indulgence; they hold all life sacred, however humble, except in the way of carefully-regulated sacrifice; and they spend their nights in prayer and meditation.

وَالشَّفَعِ وَالْوَتْرِ (٣)

3. By the Even and Odd (contrasted);

C6110. The contrast between even and odd forms the subject of learned argument among those who deal with the properties of numbers. In any case, even and odd follow each other in regular succession: each is independent, and yet neither is self-sufficient. In ultimate analysis every even number is a pair of odd ones. And all things go in pairs: see 36:36, and n. 3981.

In the animal world pairs are but two individuals, and yet each is a complement of the other. Both abstract and concrete things are often understood in contrast with their opposites. Why should we not, in spiritual matters, understand this life better with reference to the Hereafter, and why should we disbelieve in the Hereafter simply because we cannot conceive of anything different from our present life?

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرُ (٤)

4. And by the Night when it passeth away --

C6111. That is, the last part of the night, just before full day-light. Note the gradations:

- first, the turn of the night, when just the first rays of daylight break through;
- secondly, the social and institutional rites of religion, like those during the ten nights of Pilgrimage;
- thirdly, when the usual contrast between the Here and Hereafter vanishes, and we can see heaven even here; and
- lastly, when this world vanishes, the full light of Day arrives, and we see Reality face to face.

هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِي حِجْرٍ (٥)

5. Is there (not) in these and adjuration (or evidence) for those who understand?

C6112. All these Signs draw our attention, like solemn adjurations in speech, to the profoundest mystery of our inner life, viz., how from utter depths of darkness-ignorance or even degradation-Allah's wonderful light or

Revelation can lead us by contrast into the most beautiful sunshine of a glorious spiritual Day.

But the contrast suggest also the opposite process as a corollary-how resistance to Allah's fight would destroy us utterly, converting our greatness or glory to perdition, as happened with the peoples of Arab antiquity, the 'Ad and the Thamud, and the type of the powerful but arrogant and godless monarch, the Pharaoh of Egypt. Like a man with a bounded horizon, the average man does not understand these long-range mysteries of life, and we have need to pray that we may be of "those who understand".

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ (٦)

6. Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with the 'Ad (people) -

C6113. For the 'Ad see n. 1040 to 7:65.

They seem to have possessed an ancient civilisation, which succumbed when they persistently broke Allah's law.

إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ (٧)

7. Of the (city of) Iram, with lofty pillars,

C6114. Iram would seem to have been an ancient 'Ad capital, in southern Arabia. It boasted of lofty architecture ("lofty pillars").

Some Commentators understand **Iram** to be the name of an eponymous hero of the 'Ad, in which case the following fine, "with lofty pillars", should be construed "of lofty stature". The 'Ad were a tall race.

الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلَهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ (٨)

8. The like of which were not produced in (all) the land?

C6115. This tract of southern Arabia was once very prosperous (Arabia Felix) and contains ruins and inscriptions. It has always been an object of great

interest to the Arabia. In the time of Mu'awiyah some precious stones were found among the ruins in this locality.

Quite recently, a bronze lion's head and a bronze piece of gutter with a Sabaean inscription, found in Najran, have been described in the British Museum Quarterly, vol, XI, No. 4, Sept. 1937.

وَتَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ (٩)

9. And with the Thamud (people), who cut out (huge) rocks in the valley? --

C6116. For the Thamud see n. 1043 to 7:73.

Their civilisation shows traces of Egyptian, Syrian, and (later) Greek and Roman influences. They built fine temples, tombs, and buildings cut out of the solid rock. The cult of the goddess Lat flourished among them.

وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ (١٠)

10. And with Pharaoh, Lord of Stakes?

C6117. For "**Lord of Stakes**", see 38:12, n 4160.

For Pharaoh's arrogance and his fall see 20:43, 78-79.

The three examples given, the 'Ad, the Thamud, and Pharaoh, show that neither nations nor individuals, however mighty, prosperous, or firmly established they may be, can live if they transgress the Law of Allah. The Law of Allah, which is also the law of the higher nature which He has bestowed on us, made them in the first place great and glorious: when they fell from it and "heaped mischief on mischief", they were swept away.

الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ (١١)

11. (All) these transgressed Beyond bounds in the lands.

فَأَكْتَرُوا فِيهَا الْفُسَادَ (١٢)

12. And heaped therein Mischief (on mischief).

فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ (١٣)

13. Therefore did thy Lord pour on them a scourge of diverse chastisement:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمُرْصَادِ (١٤)

14. For thy Lord is (As a Guardian) on a watchtower.

C6118. Even though Allah's punishment is delayed, it is not to be supposed that He does not see all things. Allah's providence is ever vigilant: His punishment of evil doers is a form of justice to the weak and the righteous whom they oppress. It is part of the signification of His title as **Rabb** (Cherisher). (R).

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ ...

15. Now, as for man,

C6119. Contrast with Allah's justice and watchful care, man's selfishness and pettiness. Allah tries us both by prosperity and adversity:

- in the one we should show humility and kindness;
- and in the other patience and faith.

On the contrary, we get puffed up in prosperity and depressed in adversity, putting false values on this world's goods.

... إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ ...

when his Lord trieth him giving him honor and gifts, then saith he, (puffed up),

... رَبِّي أَكْرَمَن (١٥)

"My Lord hath honored me."

وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ ...

16. But when He trieth him, restricting his subsistence for him,

C6120. Subsistence, in both the literal and the figurative sense. Allah provides for all, but people complain if the

provision is measured and restricted to their needs, circumstances, and antecedents, and does not come up to their desires or expectations, or is different from that given to people in quite different circumstances.

... فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِي (١٦)

then saith he (in despair), "My Lord hath humiliated me!"

كَلَّا بَلْ لَأَكْثُرْمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (١٧)

17. Nay, nay! **but ye honor not the orphans!**

C6121. Even at our own valuation, if we are favoured with superfluities, do we think of the fatherless children, or the struggling poor?

On the contrary, too many men are but ready to embezzle the helpless orphan's inheritance, and to waste their own substance in worthless riot instead of supplying the people's real needs.

وَلَا تُحَاضِرُونَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ الْمُسْكِينِ (١٨)

18. Nor do ye encourage **one another** to feed the poor! --

C6122. Kindness and generosity set up standards which even worldly men feel bound to follow out of social considerations even if they are not moved by higher motives. But the wicked find plausible excuses for their own hard-heartedness, and by their evil example choke up the springs of charity and kindness in others.

وَتَأْكُلُونَ الثَّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَّمًّا (١٩)

19. And **ye devour inheritance** -- all with greed.

C6123. Inheritance is abused in two ways.

1. Guardians and trustees for the inheritance of minors or women or persons unable to look after their own interests should fulfil their trusts with even more care than they devote to their own interests. Instead of that they selfishly "devour" the property.

2. Persons who inherit property in their own rights should remember that in that case, too, it is a sacred trust. They must use it for the purposes, objects, and duties which they also inherit. It gives them no license to live in idleness or waste their days in riotous show.

وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا (٢٠)

20. And ye love wealth with inordinate love!

كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا (٢١)

21. Nay! when the earth is pounded to powder,

C6124. Our attention is now called to the Day of Reckoning. Whether we failed to respect the rights of the helpless here or actually suppressed those rights in our mad love for the good thing of this life, we shall have to answer in the realm of Reality. This solid earth, which we imagine to be so real, will crumble to powder like dust before the real Presence, manifested in glory.

وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا (٢٢)

22. And thy Lord cometh and His angels, rank upon rank,

وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ ...

23. And Hell, that Day, is brought (face to face) --

C6125. The Retribution will at last come, and we shall realise it in our inmost being, all the illusions of this fleeting world having been swept away. Then we shall remember, and wish, too late, that we had repented.

Why not repent now?

Why not bring forth the fruits of repentance now, as a preparation for the Hereafter?

... يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى (٢٣)

on that Day will man remember, but how will that remembrance profit him?

يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (٢٤)

24. He will say:

"Ah! would that I had sent forth (Good Deeds) for (this) my (Future) Life."

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَّا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابُهُ أَحَدًا (٢٥)

25. For, that Day, His Chastisement will be such as none (else) can inflict,

C6126. "Chastisement" in this verse and the "binding in bonds" in the next verse are two distinct phases of the Penalty.

"Chastisement" involves pain and agony, such as cannot be imagined anywhere else, or from any other source, for it touches our inmost soul and cannot be compared with anything our bodies may suffer or others may inflict.

"Bonds" imply confinement, want of freedom, the closing of a door which was once open but which we deliberately passed by. We see that others accepted in faith and entered that door. This shutting out of what might have been in worse than any other bonds or confinement we can imagine, and may be worse than actual chastisement.

وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَتَاقَهُ أَحَدًا (٢٦)

26. And His bonds will be such as none (other) can bind.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ ...

27. (To the righteous soul will be said:) "O (thou) soul,

C6127. The righteous enter into their inheritance and receive their welcome with a title that suggests freedom from all pain, sorrow, doubt, struggle, disappointment, passion, and even further desire; at rest, in peace; in a state of complete satisfaction.

In Muslim theology, this stage of the soul is the final stage of bliss. The unregenerate human soul, that seeks its satisfaction in the lower earthly desires, is the

Ammara (12:53). The self-reproaching soul that feels conscious of sin and resists it is the **Lawwama** (75:2, and n. 5810).

... الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ (٢٧)

in (complete) rest and satisfaction!

... ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكَ ...

28. "Come back thou to thy Lord --

C6128. Note that Evil finds itself isolated, and cries out in lonely agony (verse 24), while Good receives a warm welcome from the Lord of Goodness Himself,-also that it is the soul which enters heaven, and not the gross body which perishes.

... رَاضِيَةٌ مَرْضِيَّةٌ (٢٨)

well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto Him!

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي (٢٩)

29. "Enter thou, then, among my Devotees!

وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي (٣٠)

30. "Yea, enter thou my Heaven"!

C6129. The climax of the whole is: "Enter My Heaven!"

Men may have imagined all kinds of heaven before, and many types are used in the sacred Word itself. But nothing can express the reality itself better than "My Heaven"-Allah's own Heaven! May we reach it through Allah's grace! (R).