

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

**THE
HOLY QURAN**

**ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 91
SURAH ASH-SHAMS**

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

www.quran.live

HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

091

SURAH ASH-SHAMS

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Introduction and Summary

This is one of the early Makkan revelations. Beginning with a fine nature passage, and leading up to man's need of realising his spiritual responsibility, it ends with a warning of the terrible consequences for those who fear not the Hereafter.

C.271 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*All nature around us and her pageants,
And the soul of man within, proclaim
The goodness of Allah. Allah gave the soul
The power of choice and the sense of Right*

*And Wrong. Let man keep it pure and attain
Salvation---soil it with sin and reach
Perdition. Inordinate wrongdoing ruined
The Thamud. They defied Allah's sacred Law
And His Prophet, and went to Destruction for their crime.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا (١)

1. By the Sun and his (glorious) splendor;

C6147. Six types are taken in three pairs, from Allah's mighty works in nature, as tokens or evidence of Allah's providence and the contrasts in His sublime creation, which yet conduce to cosmic harmony (verses 1-6).

Then (verses 7-8) the soul of man, with internal order and proportion in its capacities and faculties, as made by Allah, is appealed to as having been endowed with the power of discriminating between right and wrong.

Then the conclusion is stated in verses 9-10, that man's success or failure, prosperity or bankruptcy, would depend upon his keeping that soul pure or his corrupting it.

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَاهَا (٢)

2. By the Moon as she follows him;

C6148. The first pair is the glorious sun, the source of our light and physical life, and the moon which follows or acts as second to the sun for illuminating our world.

The moon, when she is in the sky with the sun, is pale and inconspicuous; in the sun's absence she shines with reflected light and may metaphorically be called the sun's vicegerent. So with Revelation and the great Prophets who brought it; and the minor Teachers who derive their light reflected, or perhaps doubly reflected, from the original source.

وَالنَّهَارَ إِذَا جَاءَهَا (٣)

3. By the Day as it shows up (the Sun's) glory;

C6149. The next contrasted pair consists, not of luminaries, but conditions, or periods of time, Day and Night.

The Day reveals the sun's glory and the Night conceals it from our sight. So there may be contrasts in our subjective reception of divine light, but it is there, working all the time, and must reappear in its own good time.

وَاللَّيْلَ إِذَا يَعْشَاهَا (٤)

4. By the Night as it conceals it;

وَالسَّمَاءَ وَمَا بَنَاهَا (٥)

5. By the Firmament and its (wonderful) structure;

C6150. The next contrasted pair is the wonderful firmament on high, and the earth below our feet, stretching away to our wide horizons.

The sky gives us rain, and the earth gives us food. Yet both work together; for the rain is moisture sucked up from the earth, and the food cannot grow without the heat and warmth of the sun.

There are many other contrasts under this head; yet they all point to unity.

وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا طَحَاهَا (٦)

6. By the Earth and its (wide) expanse;

C6151. The **ma masdariya** in Arabic, in this and the subsequent clauses, is best translated in English by nouns. Thus what would literally be "and the (wonderful) making or construction of it" or "the fact of its (wonderful) construction" is, idiomatically, "its (wonderful) structure." "The (wide) spreading out" of the earth is rendered "its (wide) expanse," and so on.

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا (٧)

7. By the Soul, and the proportion and order Given to it;

C6152. Allah makes the soul, and gives it order, proportion, and relative perfection, in order to adapt it for the particular circumstances in which it has to live its life.

Cf. 32:9. See also n. 120 to 2:117.

He breathes into it an understanding of what is sin, impiety, wrong-doing and what is piety and right conduct, in the special circumstances in which it may be placed. This is the most precious gift of all to man, the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong.

After the six external evidences mentioned in verses 1-6 above, this internal evidence of Allah's goodness is mentioned as the greatest of all. By these various tokens man should learn that his success, his prosperity, his salvation depends on himself---on his keeping his soul pure as Allah made it; and his failure, his decline, his perdition depends on his soiling his soul by choosing evil.

فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (٨)

8. And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right; --

فَقَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (٩)

9. Truly he succeeds that purifies it,

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (١٠)

10. And he fails that corrupts it!

C6153. This is the core of the Sura, and it is illustrated by a reference to the story of the Thamud in the following verses.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا (١١)

11. The Thamud (people) rejected (their prophet) through their inordinate wrongdoing.

C6154. The allusion to the story of the Thamud will be understood by a reference to 7:73-79; see specially n. 1044.

Their prophet was Salih, but he had to deal with an arrogant people, who oppressed the poor and denied them their rights of watering and pasture for their cattle.

إِذِ انبَعَثَ أَشْقَاهَا (١٢)

12. Behold, the most wicked Man among them was deputed (for impiety).

C6155. The prophet Salih was given a certain she-camel as a Sign, a test case, "This she-camel of Allah is Sign unto you: so leave her to graze in Allah's earth and let her come to no harm, or ye shall be seized with a grievous punishment" (7:73).

But they plotted to kill her and sent the most wicked man among them to dare and do that deed of impiety. It was probably when she came to drink at the stream that she was hamstrung and killed.

See 26:155, and 54:27.

فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا (١٣)

13. But the messenger of Allah said to them:

"It is a She-camel of Allah! and (bar her not from) having her drink!"

C6156. That is, Salih: see last note.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا ...

14. Then they rejected him (as a false prophet), and they hamstrung her.

C6157. The man who was deputed to do the impious deed of hamstringing the she-camel had of course the sympathy and cooperation of the whole people. Only he was more daring than the rest.

... فَدَمَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَسَوَّاهَا (١٤)

So their Lord, on account of their crime, obliterated their traces and made them equal (in destruction, High and low)!

وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا (١٥)

15. **And for Him is no fear of its consequences.**

C6158. This verse has been variously construed. I follow the general opinion in referring the pronoun "**Him**" to "their Lord" in the last verse and the pronoun "its" to the Punishment that was meted out to all, high and low, equally.

In that case the meaning would be: God decreed the total destruction of the Thamud;

in the case of creatures any such destruction might cause a loss to them, and they might fear the consequences of such loss or destruction, but Allah has created and can create at will, and there can be no question of any such apprehension in His case.

An alternative view is that "**him**" refers to the prophet Salih, mentioned in verse 13. Then the interpretation would be: Salih had no fear of the consequences for himself; he had warned the wicked according to his commission; he was saved by Allah's mercy as a just and righteous man, and he left them with regrets (7:79).

Yet another alternative refers "**him**" to the wicked man (mentioned in verse 12) who hamstrung the she-camel: he feared not the consequences of his deed.