

Sūrah 30: ar-Rūm

Period of Revelation

The period of the revelation of this Sūrah is determined absolutely by the historical event that has been mentioned at the outset. It says: **“The Romans have been defeated in the neighbouring land.”** In those days the Byzantine occupied territories adjacent to Arabia were Jordan, Syria and Palestine and in these territories the Romans were completely overpowered by the Persians in 615 A. D. Therefore it can be said with absolute certainty that this Sūrah was sent down in the same year and this was the year in which the migration to Abassinyah took place.

Historical Background

The prediction made in the initial verses of this Sūrah is one of the most outstanding evidences of the Qur’ān’s being the Word of God and the Prophet Muhammad’s being a true Messenger of God. Let us have a look at the historical background relevant to the verses.

Eight years before the Prophet’s advent as a Prophet the Byzantine Emperor Maurice was overthrown by Phocus who captured the throne and became king. Phocus first got the Emperor’s five sons executed in front of him and then got the Emperor also killed and hung their heads in a thoroughfare in Constantinople. A few days after this he had the empress and her three daughters also put to death. The event provided Khusrau Parvez the Sassanid king of Persia; a good moral excuse to attack Byzantium. For Emperor Maurice had been his benefactor; with his help he had got the throne of Persia. Therefore he declared that he would avenge his Godfather’s and his children’s murder upon Phocus the usurper. So he started war against Byzantium in 603 A. D. and within a few years of putting the Phocus armies to rout in succession he reached Edessa (modern Urfa) in Asia Minor on the one hand and Aleppo and Antioch in Syria on the other. When the Byzantine ministers saw that Phocus could not save the country they sought the African governor’s help who sent his son Heraclius to Constantinople with a strong fleet. Phocus was immediately deposed and Heraclius made emperor. He treated Phocus as he had treated Maurice. This happened in 610 A.D. the year the Prophet was appointed to Prophethood.

The moral excuse for which Khusrau Parvez had started the war was no more valid after the deposition and death of Phocus. Had the object of his war really been to avenge the murder of his ally on Phocus for his cruelty he would have come to terms with the new Emperor after the death of Phocus. But he continued the war and gave it the colour of a crusade between Zoroastrianism and Christianity. The sympathies of the Christian sects (i. e. Nestorians and Jacobians etc.) which had been excommunicated by the Roman ecclesiastical authority and tyrannized for years also went with the Magian (Zoroastrian) invaders and the Jews also joined hands with them; so much so that the number of the Jews who enlisted in Khusrau’s army rose up to 26, 000.

Heraclius could not stop this storm. The very first news that he received from the East after ascending the throne was that of the Persian occupation of Antioch. After this Damascus fell in 613 A. D. Then in 614 A.D. the Persians occupying Jerusalem played havoc with the Christian world. Ninety thousand Christians were massacred and the Holy Sepulchre was desecrated. The Original Cross on which according to the Christian belief Jesus had died was seized and carried to Mada’in. The chief priest Zacharia was taken prisoner and all the important churches of the city were destroyed. How puffed up was Khusrau Parvez at this victory can be judged from the letter that he wrote to Heraclius from Jerusalem. He wrote: “From Khusrau the greatest of all gods, the master of the whole world: To Heraclius his most wretched and most stupid servant: ‘You say that you have trust in your Lord. why didn’t then your Lord save Jerusalem from me?’”

Within a year after this victory the Persian armies over-ran Jordan, Palestine and the whole of the Sinai Peninsula and reached the frontiers of Egypt. In those very days another conflict of a far greater historical con-

sequence was going on in Makkah. The believers in One God under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad were fighting for their existence against the followers of Shirk (polytheism) under the command of the chiefs of the Quraysh and the conflict had reached such a stage that in 615 A. D. a substantial number of the Muslims had to leave their homes and take refuge with the Christian kingdom of Abassinyah which was an ally of the Byzantine Empire. In those days the Sassanid victories against Byzantium were the talk of the town, and the pagans of Makkah were delighted and were taunting the Muslims to the effect: "Look the fire worshipers of Persia are winning victories and the Christian believers in Revelation and Prophethood are being routed everywhere. Likewise, we, the idol worshipers of Arabia, will exterminate you and your religion."

These were the conditions when this Sūrah of the Qur'ān was sent down, and in it a prediction was made, saying: **"The Byzantines have been defeated. In the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome. Within three to nine years. To God belongs the command before and after. And that day the believers will rejoice. In the victory of God. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful."** It contained not one but two predictions: First, the Romans shall be Victorious; and second, the Muslims also shall win a victory at the same time. Apparently, there was not a remote chance of the fulfillment of the either prediction in the next few years. On the one hand, there were a handful of the Muslims, who were being beaten and tortured in Makkah, and even till eight years after this prediction there appeared no chance of their victory and domination. On the other, the Romans were losing more and more ground every next day. By 619 A.D. the whole of Egypt had passed into Sassanid hands and the Magian armies had reached as far as Tripoli. In Asia Minor they beat and pushed back the Romans to Bosphorus, and in 617 A.D. they captured Chalcedon (modern, Kadikoy) just opposite Constantinople. The Emperor sent an envoy to Khusrau, praying that he was ready to have peace on any terms, but he replied, "I shall not give protection to the emperor until he is brought in chains before me and gives up obedience to his crucified God and adopts submission to the fire God." At last, the Emperor became so depressed by defeat that he decided to leave Constantinople and shift to Carthage (modern, Tunis). The conditions were such that no one could even imagine that the Byzantine Empire would ever gain an upper hand over Persia. Not to speak of gaining domination, no one could hope that the Empire, under the circumstances, would even survive.

When these verses of the Qur'ān were sent down, the disbelievers of Makkah made great fun of them, and Ubayy bin Khalaf bet Abu Bakr ten camels if the Romans became victorious within three years. When the Prophet came to know of the bet, he said, *"The Qur'an has used the words **bid-i-sinin**, and the word bid in Arabic applies to a number up to ten. Therefore, make the bet for ten years and increase the number of camels to a hundred."* So, Abu Bakr spoke to Ubayy again and bet a hundred camels for ten years.

In 622 A.D. as the Prophet migrated to Madinah, the Emperor Heraclius set off quietly for Trabzon from Constantinople via the Black Sea and started preparations to attack Persia from the rear. For this he asked the Church for money, and Pope Sergius lent him the Church collections on interest, in a bid to save Christianity from Zoroastrianism. Heraclius started his counter attack in 623 A.D. from Armenia. Next year, in 624 A.D., he entered Azerbaijan and destroyed Clorumia, the birthplace of Zoroaster, and ravaged the principal fire temple of Persia. Great are the powers of God, this was the very year when the Muslims achieved a decisive victory at Badr for the first time against the polytheists. Thus both the predictions made in Sūrah Rum were fulfilled simultaneously within the stipulated period of ten years.

The Byzantine forces continued to press the Persians hard and in the decisive battle at Nineveh (627 A.D.) they dealt them the hardest blow. They captured the royal residence of Dastagerd, and then pressing forward reached right opposite to Ctesiphon, capital of Persia in those days. In 628 A. D. in an internal revolt, Khusrau Parvez was imprisoned and 18 of his sons were executed in front of him and a few days later he himself died in the prison. This was the year when the peace treaty of Hudaibiya was concluded, which the Qur'ān has termed as "the supreme victory," and in this very year Khusrau's son, Qubad II, gave up all the occupied Roman territories and made peace with Byzantium.

After this no one could have any doubt about the truth of the prophecy of the Qurʾān, with the result that most of the Arab polytheists accepted Islām. The heirs of Ubayy bin Khalaf lost their bet and had to give a hundred camels to Abu Bakr Siddiq. He took them before the Prophet, who ordered that they be given away in charity, because the bet had been made at a time when gambling had not yet been forbidden by the Shariah; now it was forbidden. Therefore, the bet was allowed to be accepted from the belligerent disbelievers, but instruction given that it should be given away in charity and should not be brought in personal use.

Theme and Subject Matter

The discourse begins with the theme that the Romans have been overcome and the people the world over think that the empire is about to collapse, but the fact is that within a few years the tables will be turned and the vanquished will again become victorious.

This introductory theme contains the great truth that man is accustomed to seeing only what is apparent and superficial. That which is behind the apparent and superficial he does not know. When in the petty matters of life, this habit to see only the apparent and superficial can lead man to misunderstandings and miscalculations, and when he is liable to make wrong estimates only due to lack of knowledge about “what will happen tomorrow,” how stupendous will be his error if he risks his whole life-activity by placing reliance only upon what is visible and apparent with respect to his worldly life as a whole. Then, from the question of the conflict between Byzantium and Persia the direction of the discourse turns to the theme of the Hereafter, and as far as verse 27, man has been made to understand in different ways that the Hereafter is possible as well as rational and necessary; then for the sake of keeping the system of his life also stable and balanced it is absolutely necessary that he should plan and order his present life on the faith in the Hereafter; otherwise he will commit the same error as has always been the result of placing one’s reliance only upon the apparent and the visible.

In this connection, the Signs of the universe which have been presented as evidence to prove the doctrine of the Hereafter are precisely the same which support the doctrine of Tawhid (Oneness of God). Therefore from verse 28 onward, the discourse turns to the affirmation of Tawhid and the refutation of Shirk (polytheism), and it is stressed that the natural way of life for man is none else but to serve One God exclusively. Shirk is opposed to the nature of the universe as to the nature of man. Therefore, whenever man has adopted this deviation, chaos has resulted. Again here, an allusion has been made to the great chaos that had gripped the world on account of the war between the two major powers of the time, and it has been indicated that this chaos too, is the result of shirk, and all the nations who were ever involved in mischief and chaos in the history of mankind were also polytheists.

In conclusion, a parable has been presented to make the people understand that just as dead earth comes to life, all of a sudden, by a shower of rain sent by God and swells with vegetation and plant life, so is the case with the dead humanity. When God sends a shower of His mercy in the form of Revelation and Prophethood, it also gives a new life to mankind and causes it to grow and develop and flourish. Therefore: “If you take full advantage of this opportunity, the barren land of Arabia will bloom by God’s mercy and the whole advantage will be your. But if you do not take advantage of it, you will harm only yourselves. Then no regret will avail and no opportunity will be provided to make amends.”

Sūrah 30: ar-Rūm¹⁰⁶³

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. Alif, Lām, Meem.¹⁰⁶⁴
2. The Byzantines have been defeated¹⁰⁶⁵
3. In the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome
4. Within three to nine years. To God belongs the command [i.e., decree] before and after. And that day the believers will rejoice
5. In the victory of God.¹⁰⁶⁶ He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful.
6. [It is] the promise of God. God does not fail in His promise, but most of the people do not know.
7. They know what is apparent of the worldly life, but they, of the Hereafter, are unaware.
8. Do they not contemplate within themselves?¹⁰⁶⁷ God has not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them except in truth and for a specified term. And indeed, many of the people, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, are disbelievers.
9. Have they not traveled through the earth and observed how was the end of those before them? They were greater than them in power, and they plowed [or excavated] the earth and built it up more than they [i.e., the Makkans] have built it up, and their messengers came to them with clear evidences. And God would not ever have wronged them, but they were wronging themselves.
10. Then the end of those who did evil was the worst [consequence] because they denied the signs of God and used to ridicule them.
11. God begins creation; then He will repeat it; then to Him you will be returned.
12. And the Day the Hour appears the criminals will be in despair.
13. And there will not be for them among their [alleged] partners any intercessors, and they will [then] be disbelievers in their partners.
14. And the Day the Hour appears - that Day they will become separated.
15. And as for those who had believed and done righteous deeds, they will be in a garden [of Paradise], delighted.
16. But as for those who disbelieved and denied Our verses and the meeting of the Hereafter, those will be brought into the punishment [to remain].
17. So exalted is God when you reach the evening and when you reach the morning.
18. And to Him is [due all] praise throughout the heavens and the earth. And [ex-

¹⁰⁶³ *Ar-Rūm*: The Byzantines (of the Eastern Roman Empire) or Romaeans.

¹⁰⁶⁴ See footnote to 2:1.

¹⁰⁶⁵ By the Persians.

¹⁰⁶⁶ i.e., the victory given by God to a people of the scripture (Christians) over the Magians of Persia.

¹⁰⁶⁷ An additional meaning is "Do they not contemplate concerning themselves."

- alted is He] at night and when you are at noon.
19. He brings the living out of the dead and brings the dead out of the living and brings to life the earth after its lifelessness. And thus will you be brought out.¹⁰⁶⁸
20. And of His signs is that He created you from dust; then, suddenly you were human beings dispersing [throughout the earth].
21. And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought.
22. And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.
23. And of His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking of His bounty. Indeed in that are signs for a people who listen.
24. And of His signs is [that] He shows you the lightening [causing] fear and aspiration, and He sends down rain from the sky by which He brings to life the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed in that are signs for a people who use reason.
25. And of His signs is that the heaven and earth stand [i.e., remain] by His command. Then when He calls you with a [single] call from the earth, immediately you will come forth.
26. And to Him belongs whoever is in the heavens and earth. All are to Him devoutly obedient.
27. And it is He who begins creation; then He repeats it, and that is [even] easier for Him. To Him belongs the highest description [i.e., attribute] in the heavens and earth. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.
28. He presents to you an example from yourselves. Do you have among those whom your right hands possess [i.e., slaves] any partners in what We have provided for you so that you are equal therein [and] would fear them as your fear of one another [within a partnership]?¹⁰⁶⁹ Thus do We detail the verses for a people who use reason.
29. But those who wrong follow their [own] desires without knowledge. Then who can guide one whom God has sent astray? And for them there are no helpers.
30. So direct your face [i.e., self] toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the *fitrah*¹⁰⁷⁰ of God upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of God.¹⁰⁷¹ That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know.
31. [Adhere to it], turning in repentance to Him, and fear Him and establish prayer and do not be of those who associate others with God

¹⁰⁶⁸ Of the graves or out of the earth at the time of resurrection.

¹⁰⁶⁹ See footnote to 16:71.

¹⁰⁷⁰ The natural inborn inclination of man to worship his Creator prior to the corruption of his nature by external influences. Thus, Islāmic monotheism is described as the religion of *fitrah* – that of the inherent nature of mankind.

¹⁰⁷¹ i.e., let people remain true to their *fitrah* within the religion of Islām.

32. [Or] of those who have divided their religion and become sects, every faction rejoicing in what it has.¹⁰⁷²
33. And when adversity touches the people, they call upon their Lord, turning in repentance to Him. Then when He lets them taste mercy from Him, at once a party of them associate others with their Lord,
34. So that they will deny what We have granted them.¹⁰⁷³ Then enjoy yourselves, for you are going to know.
35. Or have We sent down to them an authority [i.e., a proof or scripture], and it speaks of what they were associating with Him?
36. And when We let the people taste mercy, they rejoice therein, but if evil afflicts them for what their hands have put forth, immediately they despair.
37. Do they not see that God extends provision for whom He wills and restricts [it]? Indeed, in that are signs for a people who believe.
38. So give the relative his right, as well as the needy and the traveler. That is best for those who desire the countenance of God, and it is they who will be the successful.
39. And whatever you give for interest [i.e., advantage] to increase within the wealth of people¹⁰⁷⁴ will not increase with
- God. But what you give in zakāh,¹⁰⁷⁵ desiring the countenance of God - those are the multipliers.¹⁰⁷⁶
40. God is the one who created you, then provided for you, then will cause you to die, and then will give you life. Are there any of your “partners” who does anything of that? Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him.
41. Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He [i.e., God] may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].
42. Say, [O Muhammad], “Travel through the land and observe how was the end of those before. Most of them were associators [of others with God].
43. So direct your face [i.e., self] toward the correct religion before a Day comes from God of which there is no repelling. That Day, they will be divided.¹⁰⁷⁷
44. Whoever disbelieves - upon him is [the consequence of] his disbelief. And whoever does righteousness - they are for themselves preparing,
45. That He may reward those who have believed and done righteous deeds out of His bounty. Indeed, He does not like the disbelievers.

¹⁰⁷² Of beliefs, opinions, customs, etc.

¹⁰⁷³ Or “So let them deny what We have granted them.”

¹⁰⁷⁴ The phrase includes several connotations, among them: a) that which is given as usury or interest, b) that which is given on the condition that it be repaid with interest, and c) a gift given

with the intention of obtaining from the recipient greater benefit or a larger gift.

¹⁰⁷⁵ The meaning of *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) is included here.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Of their blessings on earth and their rewards in the Hereafter.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Into those destined for Paradise and those destined for Hell.

46. And of His signs is that He sends the winds as bringers of good tidings and to let you taste His mercy [i.e., rain] and so the ships may sail at His command and so you may seek of His bounty, and perhaps you will be grateful.
47. And We have already sent messengers before you to their peoples, and they came to them with clear evidences; then We took retribution from those who committed crimes, and incumbent upon Us was support¹⁰⁷⁸ of the believers.
48. It is God who sends the winds, and they stir the clouds and spread them in the sky however He wills, and He makes them fragments so you see the rain emerge from within them. And when He causes it to fall upon whom He wills of His servants, immediately they rejoice
49. Although they were, before it was sent down upon them - before that, in despair.
50. So observe the effects of the mercy of God - how He gives life to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed, that [same one] will give life to the dead, and He is over all things competent.
51. But if We should send a [bad] wind and they saw [their crops] turned yellow, they would remain thereafter disbelievers.¹⁰⁷⁹
52. So indeed, you will not make the dead hear, nor will you make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs, retreating.
53. And you cannot guide the blind away from their error. You will only make hear those who believe in Our verses so they are Muslims [in submission to God].
54. God is the one who created you from weakness, then made after weakness strength, then made after strength weakness and white hair. He creates what He wills, and He is the Knowing, the Competent.
55. And the Day the Hour appears the criminals will swear they had remained but an hour. Thus they were deluded.
56. But those who were given knowledge and faith will say, "You remained the extent of God's decree until the Day of Resurrection, and this is the Day of Resurrection, but you did not used to know."¹⁰⁸⁰
57. So that Day, their excuse will not benefit those who wronged, nor will they be asked to appease [God].
58. And We have certainly presented to the people in this Qur'ān from every [kind of] example. But, [O Muhammad], if you should bring them a sign, the disbelievers will surely say, "You [believers] are but falsifiers."
59. Thus does God seal the hearts of those who do not know.¹⁰⁸¹
60. So be patient. Indeed, the promise of God is truth. And let them not disquiet you who are not certain [in faith].

¹⁰⁷⁸ i.e., aid or the bestowal of victory.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Denying and ungrateful for the previous favours of God.

¹⁰⁸⁰ i.e., acknowledge the truth.

¹⁰⁸¹ i.e., those who do not wish to know the truth and refuse it.