

## Sūrah 38: Sād

### Period of Revelation

As will be explained below according to some hadith, this Sūrah was sent down in the period when the Prophet had started calling the people openly to Islām in Makkah and this had caused great alarm among the chiefs of the Quraysh. If this be true its period of revelation would be about the 4th year of the Prophethood. According to some other hadith it was sent down after Umar's embracing Islām and this happened as is well known after the migration to Abassinyah. Another chain of the traditions shows that the event which occasioned the revelation of this Sūrah took place during the last illness of Abu Talib. If this be correct the period of its revelation would be the 10th or 11th year of the Prophethood.

### Historical Background

Here is a resume of the hadith related by Imām Ahmad, Nasa'i, Tirmidhi, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Shaibah, Ibn Abi Hatim Muhammad, Ibn Ishaq and others:

When Abu Talib fell ill and the Quraysh chiefs knew that his end was near they held consultations and decided to approach the old chief with the request that he should solve the dispute between them and his nephew. For they feared that if Abu Talib died and then they subjected Muhammad to a harsh treatment after his death the Arabs would taunt them saying, 'they were afraid of the old chief as long as he lived now that he is dead they have started maltreating his nephew.' At least 25 of the Quraysh chiefs including Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, Umayyah bin Khalaf, Aa's bin Wa'il Aswad bin al-Muttalib, 'Uqbah bin Abi Mu'ait, Utbah and Shaibah went to Abu Talib. First they put before him their complaints against the Prophet as usual then said, '*We have come to present before you a just request and it is this : let your nephew leave us to our religion and we shall leave him to his. He may worship whomever he may please: we shall not stand in his way in this matter; but he should not condemn our gods and should not try to force us to give them up. Please tell him to make terms with us on this condition.*' Abu Talib called the Prophet and said, '*Dear nephew these people of your tribe have come to me with a request. They want you to agree with them on a just matter so as to put an end to your dispute with them.*' Then he told him about the request of the chiefs of the Quraysh. The Prophet replied, '*Dear uncle: I shall request them to agree upon a thing which if they accept will enable them to conquer the whole of Arabia and subject the non-Arab world to their domination.*' Hearing this the people were first confounded; they did not know how they should turn down such a proposal. Then after they had considered the matter they replied: '*You speak of one word: we are prepared to repeat ten others like it but please tell us what it is.*' The Prophet said: '*La ilaha ill-Allah.*' (There is none worthy of worship except God) At this they got up all together and left the place saying what God has narrated in the initial part of this Sūrah.

Ibn Sa'd in his Tabaqat has related this event just as cited above but according to him this did not happen during Abu Talib's last illness but at the time when the Prophet had started preaching Islām openly and the news of the conversion of one person or the other was being heard almost daily in Makkah. In those days the Quraysh chiefs had led several deputations to Abu Talib and had asked him to stop Muhammad from preaching his message and it was with one of those deputations that this conversation had taken place.

### Subject Matter and Topics

The Sūrah begins with a review of the aforesaid meeting. Making the dialogue between the Prophet and the disbelievers the basis, God says that the actual reason with those people for their denial is not any defect in the message of Islām but their own arrogance, jealousy and insistence on following the blind. They are not prepared to believe in a man from their own clan as a Prophet of God and follow him. They want to persist in the ideas of ignorance which they have found their ancestors following. And when a person exposes this ignorance and presents the truth before them, they are alarmed and regard it as an oddity, rather as a novel and impossible thing. For them the concept of Tawhid and the Hereafter is not only an unacceptable creed but also a concept which only deserves to be ridiculed and mocked.

Then, God, both in the initial part of the Sūrah and in its last sentences, has precisely warned the disbelievers, as if to say, “The man whom you are ridiculing today and whose guidance you reject will soon overpower you, and the time is not far when in this very city of Makkah, where you are persecuting him, he will overwhelm you completely.” Then describing nine of the Prophets, one after the other, with greater details of the story of the Prophets David and Solomon; God has emphasized the point that His Law of Justice is impartial and objective, that only the right attitude of man is acceptable to Him, that He calls to account and punishes every wrongdoer, whoever he be, and that He likes only those people who do not persist in wrongdoing but repent as soon as they are warned of it, and pass their life in the world keeping in mind their accountability in the Hereafter.

After this, the final end that the obedient servants and the disobedient people will meet in the Hereafter, has been depicted, and two things have been especially impressed on the disbelievers:

1. That the leaders and guides whom the ignorant people are following blindly in the world, on the way of deviation, will have reached Hell even before their followers in the Hereafter, and the two groups will be cursing each other there;
2. That the disbelievers will be amazed to see that there is no trace whatever in Hell of the believers whom they used to regard as contemptible in the world and will themselves be involved in its torment.

In conclusion, mention has been made of the story of Adam and Iblis (Satan), which is meant to tell the disbelieving Quraysh that the same arrogance and vanity which was preventing them from bowing before Muhammad had prevented Iblis also from bowing before Adam. Iblis felt jealous of the high rank God had given to Adam and became accursed when he disobeyed His Command. Likewise, “You, O people of Quraysh, are feeling jealous of the high rank God has bestowed on Muhammad and are not prepared to obey him whom God has appointed His messenger. Therefore, you will be doomed ultimately to the same fate as will be met by Satan.”

**Sūrah 38: Sād**<sup>1230</sup>

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

1. Sād.<sup>1231</sup> By the Qurʾān containing reminder...<sup>1232</sup>
2. But those who disbelieve are in pride and dissension.
3. How many a generation have We destroyed before them, and they [then] called out; but it was not a time for escape.
4. And they wonder that there has come to them a warner [i.e., Prophet Muhammad] from among themselves. And the disbelievers say, “This is a magician and a liar.
5. Has he made the gods [only] one God? Indeed, this is a curious thing.”
6. And the eminent among them went forth, [saying], “Continue, and be patient over [the defense of] your gods. Indeed, this is a thing intended.<sup>1233</sup>
7. We have not heard of this in the latest religion.<sup>1234</sup> This is not but a fabrication.
8. Has the message been revealed to him out of [all of] us?” Rather, they are in doubt about My message. Rather, they have not yet tasted My punishment.
9. Or do they have the depositories of the mercy of your Lord, the Exalted in Might, the Bestower?
10. Or is theirs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and what is between them? Then let them ascend through [any] ways of access.<sup>1235</sup>
11. [They are but] soldiers [who will be] defeated there among the companies [of disbelievers].
12. The people of Noah denied before them, and [the tribe of] ‘Aad and Pharaoh, the owner of stakes,<sup>1236</sup>
13. And [the tribe of] Thamūd and the people of Lot and the companions of the thicket [i.e., people of Madyan]. Those are the companies.<sup>1237</sup>
14. Each of them denied the messengers, so My penalty was justified.
15. And these [disbelievers] await not but one blast [of the Horn]; for it there will be no delay.<sup>1238</sup>
16. And they say, “Our Lord, hasten for us our share [of the punishment] before the Day of Account.”
17. Be patient over what they say and remember Our servant, David, the possessor of strength; indeed, he was one who repeatedly turned back [to God].

<sup>1230</sup> *Sād*: (the letter) *sād*.

<sup>1231</sup> See footnote to 2:1.

<sup>1232</sup> The completion of the oath is understood to be that the Qurʾān is inimitable and thus a miracle from God.

<sup>1233</sup> Planned by Prophet Muhammad in order to gain influence and prestige for himself.

<sup>1234</sup> Referring to Christianity or possibly the pagan religion of the Quraysh.

<sup>1235</sup> To oversee the affairs of their dominion.

<sup>1236</sup> By which he tortured people.

<sup>1237</sup> That were defeated, among whom will be the disbelievers of Quraysh and others.

<sup>1238</sup> Or “respite.” More literally, “a period between two milkings of a she-camel,” which also alludes to the meanings of “return” or “repetition.”

18. Indeed, We subjected the mountains [to praise] with him, exalting [God] in the [late] afternoon and [after] sunrise.
19. And the birds were assembled, all with him repeating [praises].
20. And We strengthened his kingdom and gave him wisdom and discernment in speech.
21. And has there come to you the news of the adversaries, when they climbed over the wall of [his] prayer chamber -
22. When they entered upon David and he was alarmed by them? They said, "Fear not. [We are] two adversaries, one of whom has wronged the other, so judge between us with truth and do not exceed [it] and guide us to the sound path.
23. Indeed this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe; so he said, 'Entrust her to me,' and he overpowered me in speech."
24. [David] said, "He has certainly wronged you in demanding your ewe [in addition] to his ewes. And indeed, many associates oppress one another, except for those who believe and do righteous deeds - and few are they." And David became certain that We had tried him, and he asked forgiveness of his Lord<sup>1239</sup> and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to God].
25. So We forgave him that; and indeed, for him is nearness to Us and a good place of return.
26. [We said], "O David, indeed We have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of God." Indeed, those who go astray from the way of God will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account.
27. And We did not create the heaven and the earth and that between them aimlessly. That is the assumption of those who disbelieve, so woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire.
28. Or should We treat those who believe and do righteous deeds like corrupters in the land? Or should We treat those who fear God like the wicked?
29. [This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded.
30. And to David We gave Solomon. An excellent servant, indeed he was one repeatedly turning back [to God].
31. [Mention] when there were exhibited before him in the afternoon the poised [standing] racehorses.
32. And he said, "Indeed, I gave preference to the love of good [things] over the remembrance of my Lord until it [i.e., the sun] disappeared into the curtain [of darkness]."

<sup>1239</sup> For his errors, such as fear and suspicion of the two men at the outset, any mistake in judgement he might have made, concealed feelings of partiality, etc.

33. [He said], “Return them to me,” and set about striking<sup>1240</sup> [their] legs and necks.
34. And We certainly tried Solomon and placed on his throne a body;<sup>1241</sup> then he returned.<sup>1242</sup>
35. He said, “My Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom such as will not belong to anyone after me. Indeed, You are the Bestower.”
36. So We subjected to him the wind blowing by his command, gently, wherever he directed,
37. And [also] the devils [of jinn] - every builder and diver
38. And others bound together in shackles.
39. [We said], “This is Our gift, so grant or withhold without account.”
40. And indeed, for him is nearness to Us and a good place of return.
41. And remember Our servant Job, when he called to his Lord, “Indeed, Satan has touched me with hardship and torment.”
42. [So he was told], “Strike [the ground] with your foot; this is a [spring for a] cool bath and drink.”
43. And We granted him his family and a like [number] with them as mercy from Us and a reminder for those of understanding.
44. [We said], “And take in your hand a bunch [of grass] and strike with it and do not break your oath.”<sup>1243</sup> Indeed, We found him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back [to God].
45. And remember Our servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - those of strength and [religious] vision.
46. Indeed, We chose them for an exclusive quality: remembrance of the home [of the Hereafter].
47. And indeed they are, to Us, among the chosen and outstanding.
48. And remember Ishmael, Elisha and Dhul-Kifl, and all are among the outstanding.
49. This is a reminder. And indeed, for the righteous is a good place of return -
50. Gardens of perpetual residence, whose doors will be opened to them.
51. Reclining within them, they will call therein for abundant fruit and drink.
52. And with them will be women limiting [their] glances<sup>1244</sup> and of equal age.
53. This is what you, [the righteous], are promised for the Day of Account.
54. Indeed, this is Our provision; for it there is no depletion.

<sup>1240</sup> With his sword as expiation. Some commentaries have also suggested the meaning of “stroking” with the hand.

<sup>1241</sup> Said to be a devil or a lifeless body (one without capability), but God alone knows.

<sup>1242</sup> To sovereignty and to God in repentance.

<sup>1243</sup> At a point during his illness, Job became very angry with his wife and swore that if he recovered, he would punish her with one hundred lashes. According to God’s instruction, the oath was fulfilled by striking her once with one hundred blades of grass.

<sup>1244</sup> To their mates alone.

55. This [is so]. But indeed, for the transgressors is an evil place of return -
56. Hell, which they will [enter to] burn, and wretched is the resting place.
57. This - so let them taste it - is scalding water and [foul] purulence
58. And other [punishments] of its type [in various] kinds.
59. [Its inhabitants will say], "This is a company bursting in with you. No welcome for them. Indeed, they will burn in the Fire."
60. They will say, "Nor you! No welcome for you. You, [our leaders], brought this upon us, and wretched is the settlement."
61. They will say, "Our Lord, whoever brought this upon us - increase for him double punishment in the Fire."
62. And they will say, "Why do we not see men whom we used to count among the worst?<sup>1245</sup>
63. Is it [because] we took them in ridicule, or has [our] vision turned away from them?"
64. Indeed, that is truth [i.e., reality] - the quarreling of the people of the Fire.
65. Say, [O Muhammad], "I am only a warner, and there is not any deity except God, the One, the Prevailing,
66. Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, the Exalted in Might, the Perpetual Forgiver."
67. Say, "It is great news
68. From which you turn away.
69. I had no knowledge of the exalted assembly [of angels] when they were disputing [the creation of Adam].
70. It has not been revealed to me except that I am a clear warner."
71. [So mention] when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay.
72. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul,<sup>1246</sup> then fall down to him in prostration."
73. So the angels prostrated - all of them entirely.
74. Except Iblees;<sup>1247</sup> he was arrogant and became among the disbelievers.
75. [God] said, "O Iblees, what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My hands?<sup>1248</sup> Were you arrogant [then], or were you [already] among the haughty?"
76. He said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay."
77. [God] said, "Then get out of it [i.e., Paradise], for indeed, you are expelled.
78. And indeed, upon you is My curse until the Day of Recompense."

<sup>1245</sup> They are referring to the believers.

<sup>1246</sup> See footnote to 15:29.

<sup>1247</sup> See footnote to 2:34.

<sup>1248</sup> See footnote to 2:19.

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79. He said, “My Lord, then relieve me until the Day they are resurrected.”
80. [God] said, “So indeed, you are of those relieved
81. Until the Day of the time well-known.”
82. [Iblees] said, “By your might, I will surely mislead them all
83. Except, among them, Your chosen servants.”
84. [God] said, “The truth [is My oath], and the truth I say -
85. [That] I will surely fill Hell with you and those of them that follow you all together.”
86. Say, [O Muhammad], “I do not ask you for it [i.e., the Qur’ān] any payment, and I am not of the pretentious.
87. It is but a reminder to the worlds.
88. And you will surely know [the truth of] its information after a time.”