

Sūrah 44: ad-Dukhān

Period of Revelation

Its period of revelation also could not be determined from any authentic tradition, but the internal evidence of the subject matter shows that this Sūrah too was sent down in the same period in which Sūrah az-Zukhruf and a few other earlier Sūrahs had been revealed. However, this Sūrah was sent down somewhat later. Its historical background is this: When the disbelievers of Makkah became more and more antagonistic in their attitude and conduct, the Prophet prayed: O God, help me with a famine like the famine of Joseph. He thought that when the people would be afflicted with a calamity, they would remember God, their hearts would soften and they would accept the admonition. God granted his prayer, and the whole land was overtaken by such a terrible famine that the people were sorely distressed. At last, some of the Quraysh chiefs among whom Abdullah bin Masud has particularly mentioned the name of Abu Sufyan came to the Prophet and requested him to pray to God to deliver his people from the calamity. On this occasion God sent down this Sūrah.

Subject Matter and Topics

The introduction to the address revealed on this occasion for the admonition and warning of the people of Makkah contained some important points, which are as follows:

1. "You, O People of Makkah, are wrong in thinking that the Qur'ān is being composed by Muhammad . This Book by itself bears the clear testimony that it is not the composition of a man but of God, Lord of the worlds."
2. "You are making a wrong estimate of the worth of this Book. You think it is a calamity that has descended on you, whereas the Hour when God, out of sheer mercy, decided to send His Messenger and His Book to you was highly blessed."
3. "You are foolishly involved in the misunderstanding that you will fight this Messenger and this Book and will win, whereas the fact is that the Messenger has been raised and the Book sent down in that particular Hour when God decides the destinies, and God's decisions are not so weak that they may be changed to a person's liking, nor are they based on ignorance and folly that there may be the likelihood of a mistake or error or weakness in them. They are rather the firm and unalterable decisions of the Ruler of the Universe, Who is All Hearing, All Knowing and All Wise. Therefore, they cannot be treated lightly."
4. "You yourselves acknowledge that God alone is the Master and Lord of the earth and heavens and of everything in the Universe and also admit that life and death are only in His power, yet you insist on making others your deities, for which the only argument you offer is that that had been the practice since the time of your forefathers, whereas if a person has the conviction that God alone is the Master, Sustainer and Giver of life and death, he can never entertain the doubt that there can be other gods also beside Him, who can be worthy of worship. If your forefathers had committed this folly, there is no reason why you also should continue committing it blindly. As a matter of fact, their Lord too was only One God, Who is your Lord, and they also should have worshipped only Him, Whom you should worship."
5. "The only demand of God's Providence and Mercifulness is not this that He should feed you, but also this that He should arrange guidance for you. For this very guidance He has sent His Messenger and His Book."

After this introduction, the question of the famine that was raging in Makkah has been discussed. As already mentioned, this famine had occurred on the Prophet's prayer, and he had prayed for it so that when the calamity befell it would break the stubbornness of the disbelievers and then they would listen to the rebuke. It looked as if this expectation was being fulfilled to some extent, for some of the most stubborn enemies of the Truth, on account of the severity of the famine, had cried out: "O Lord, avert this torment from us and

we will believe.” At this, on the one hand, the Prophet has been foretold: “These people will not learn any lesson from such calamities. When they have turned away from the Messenger, whose life, character, works and speech clearly show that he is God’s true Messenger, how will a mere famine help remove their disbelief?” On the other, the unbelievers have been addressed, so as to say : “You lie when you say that you will believe as soon as the torment is removed from you. We shall just remove it to see how sincere you are in your promise. There is a graver disaster about to fall upon you. You need a much more crushing blow: minor misfortunes cannot set you right.”

In this very connection, a reference has been made a little below to Pharaoh and his people, implying that those people also had met with precisely the same trial as the chiefs of the disbelieving Quraysh are now afflicted. To them also a similar noble and honourable Messenger had come; they also had seen those express pointers and signs which clearly showed that he had been appointed by God; they also had gone on witnessing one sign after the other but they did not give up their stubbornness, till at last they made up their mind to put an end to the Messenger’s life, and they met their doom, which has since become an object lesson for the people for ever.

After this the theme of the Hereafter has been taken up, which the disbelievers of Makkah vehemently denied. They said: “We have never seen anyone rising back to life after death. Raise our forefathers back to life if you are true in your claim about the life hereafter.” In response to this, two arguments for the Hereafter have been presented briefly:

1. That the denial of this creed has always proved destructive for the morals
2. That the universe is not a plaything of a thoughtless deity, but it is a wise system and no work of wisdom is ever vain or useless.

Then the disbelievers’ demand to bring their forefathers back to life has been answered, thus: “This cannot be done every day to meet the demand of the individuals, but God has appointed a time when He will resurrect all mankind simultaneously and will subject them to accountability in His Court. If one has to protect oneself there, one should think about it here. For no one will be able to save himself there by his own power, nor by the power of any one else.”

In connection with this Court of God, mention has been made of the fate of those who will be declared as culprits and of the rewards of those who will be declared as successful. The discourse has been concluded with this warning: “This Qur’ān has been revealed in simple language in your own tongue so that you may understand it; yet if you do not understand it and insist on seeing your evil end, you may wait; Our Prophet too is waiting. Whatever is to happen, will happen at its own appointed time.”

Sūrah 44: ad-Dukhān¹³⁵⁴

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

1. Hā, Meem.¹³⁵⁵
2. By the clear Book,
3. Indeed, We sent it down during a blessed night.¹³⁵⁶ Indeed, We were to warn [mankind].
4. Therein [i.e., on that night] is made distinct¹³⁵⁷ every precise matter -
5. [Every] matter [proceeding] from Us. Indeed, We were to send [a messenger]
6. As mercy from your Lord. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing,
7. Lord of the heavens and the earth and that between them, if you would be certain.
8. There is no deity except Him; He gives life and causes death. [He is] your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers.
9. But they are in doubt, amusing themselves.
10. Then watch for the Day when the sky will bring a visible smoke.
11. Covering the people; this is a painful torment.
12. [They will say], “Our Lord, remove from us the torment; indeed, we are believers.”
13. How will there be for them a reminder [at that time]? And there had come to them a clear Messenger.
14. Then they turned away from him and said, “[He was] taught [and is] a madman.”
15. Indeed, We will remove the torment for a little. Indeed, you [disbelievers] will return [to disbelief].
16. The Day We will strike with the greatest assault, indeed, We will take retribution.
17. And We had already tried before them the people of Pharaoh, and there came to them a noble messenger [i.e., Moses],
18. [Saying], “Render to me the servants of God.¹³⁵⁸ Indeed, I am to you a trustworthy messenger,”
19. And [saying], “Be not haughty with God. Indeed, I have come to you with clear authority.
20. And indeed, I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord, lest you stone me.¹³⁵⁹
21. But if you do not believe me, then leave me alone.”
22. And [finally] he called to his Lord that these were a criminal people.

¹³⁵⁴ *Ad-Dukhan*: Smoke.

¹³⁵⁵ See footnote to 2:1.

¹³⁵⁶ The Night of Decree (*Qadr*). See *sūrah* 97.

¹³⁵⁷ Or “is separated” or “apportioned,” from what is inscribed in the Preserved Slate. The angels record and descend with whatever God has decreed for the coming year.

¹³⁵⁸ i.e., the Children of Israel.

¹³⁵⁹ To death. Or “lest you assault me [with your tongues or harm me otherwise].”

23. [God said], “Then set out with My servants by night. Indeed, you are to be pursued.
24. And leave the sea in stillness.¹³⁶⁰ Indeed, they are an army to be drowned.”
25. How much they left behind of gardens and springs
26. And crops and noble sites
27. And comfort wherein they were amused.
28. Thus. And We caused to inherit it another people.
29. And the heaven and earth wept not for them, nor were they reprieved.
30. And We certainly saved the Children of Israel from the humiliating torment -
31. From Pharaoh. Indeed, he was a haughty one among the transgressors.
32. And We certainly chose them by knowledge over [all] the worlds.
33. And We gave them of signs that in which there was a clear trial.
34. Indeed, these [disbelievers] are saying,
35. “There is not but our first death, and we will not be resurrected.
36. Then bring [back] our forefathers, if you should be truthful.”
37. Are they better or the people of Tubba¹³⁶¹ and those before them? We destroyed them, [for] indeed, they were criminals.
38. And We did not create the heavens and earth and that between them in play.
39. We did not create them except in truth, but most of them do not know.
40. Indeed, the Day of Judgement is the appointed time for them all -
41. The Day when no relation¹³⁶² will avail a relation at all, nor will they be helped -
42. Except those [believers] on whom God has mercy. Indeed, He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful.
43. Indeed, the tree of zaqqūm
44. Is food for the sinful.
45. Like murky oil, it boils within bellies
46. Like the boiling of scalding water.
47. [It will be commanded], “Seize him and drag him into the midst of the Hellfire,
48. Then pour over his head from the torment of scalding water.”
49. [It will be said], “Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!¹³⁶³
50. Indeed, this is what you used to dispute.”
51. Indeed, the righteous will be in a secure place:

¹³⁶⁰ After it has parted, in order that soldiers of Pharaoh would follow the Children of Israel and be drowned.

¹³⁶¹ The tribe of Saba’.

¹³⁶² i.e., patron, protector or close associate.

¹³⁶³ As he had claimed upon the earth. He is taunted with these words in Hell as a reminder and additional torment.

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52. Within gardens and springs,
 53. Wearing [garments of] fine silk and brocade, facing each other.
 54. Thus. And We will marry them to fair women with large, [beautiful] eyes.
 55. They will call therein for every [kind of] fruit - safe and secure.
 56. They will not taste death therein except the first death, and He will have protected them from the punishment of Hellfire
 57. As bounty from your Lord. That is what is the great attainment.
 58. And indeed, We have eased it [i.e., the Qur'ān] in your tongue that they might be reminded.
 59. So watch, [O Muhammad]; indeed, they are watching [for your end].