

Sūrah 85: al-Burūj

Period of Revelation

The subject matter itself indicates that this Sūrah was sent down at Makkah in the period when persecution of the Muslims was at its climax and the disbelievers of Makkah were trying their utmost by tyranny and coercion to turn away the new reverts from Islām.

Theme and Subject Matter

Its theme is to warn the disbelievers of the evil consequences of the persecution and tyranny that they were perpetrating on the reverts to Islām, and to console the believers, so as to say: "If you remain firm and steadfast against tyranny and coercion, you will be rewarded richly for it, and God will certainly avenge Himself on your persecutors on your behalf."

In this connection, first of all the story of the people of the ditch (ashāb al-ukhdud) had been related, who had burnt the believers to death by casting them into pits full of fire. By means of this story the believers and the disbelievers have been taught a few lessons. First, that just as the people of the ditch became worthy of God's curse and punishment, so are the chiefs of Makkah also becoming worthy of it. Second, that just as the believers at that time had willingly accepted to sacrifice their lives by being burnt to death in the pits of fire instead of turning away from the faith, so also the believers now should endure every persecution but should never give up the faith. Third, that God, acknowledging Whom displeases the disbelievers and is urged on by the believers, is Dominant and Master of the Kingdom of the earth and heavens; He is self-praiseworthy and is watching what the two groups are striving for. Therefore, it is certain that the disbelievers will not only be punished in Hell for their disbelief but, more than that, they too will suffer punishment by fire as a fit recompense for their tyranny and cruelties. Likewise, this also is certain that those, who believe and follow up their belief with good deeds, should go to Paradise and this indeed is the supreme success. Then the disbelievers have been warned, so as to say: "God's grip is very severe. If you are proud of the strength of your hosts, you should know that the hosts of Pharaoh and Thamūd were even stronger and more numerous. Therefore, you should learn a lesson from the fate they met. God's power has so encompassed you that you cannot escape His encirclement, and the Qur'ān that you are bent upon belying, is unchangeable: it is inscribed in the Preserved Tablet, which cannot be corrupted in any way."

Sūrah 85: al-Burūj¹⁷⁶⁵

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

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| <p>1. By the sky containing great stars</p> <p>2. And [by] the promised Day</p> <p>3. And [by] the witness and what is witnessed,</p> <p>4. Destroyed [i.e., cursed] were the companions of the trench¹⁷⁶⁶</p> <p>5. [Containing] the fire full of fuel,</p> <p>6. When they were sitting near it</p> <p>7. And they, to what they were doing against the believers, were witnesses.¹⁷⁶⁷</p> <p>8. And they resented them not except because they believed in God, the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy,</p> <p>9. To whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And God, over all things, is Witness.</p> <p>10. Indeed, those who have tortured¹⁷⁶⁸ the believing men and believing women</p> | <p>and then have not repented will have the punishment of Hell, and they will have the punishment of the Burning Fire.</p> <p>11. Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds will have gardens beneath which rivers flow. That is the great attainment.</p> <p>12. Indeed, the assault [i.e., vengeance] of your Lord is severe.</p> <p>13. Indeed, it is He who originates [creation] and repeats.</p> <p>14. And He is the Forgiving, the Affectionate,</p> <p>15. Honourable Owner of the Throne,</p> <p>16. Effecter of what He intends.</p> <p>17. Has there reached you the story of the soldiers -</p> <p>18. [Those of] Pharaoh and Thamūd?</p> <p>19. But they who disbelieve are in [persistent] denial,</p> <p>20. While God encompasses them from behind.¹⁷⁶⁹</p> <p>21. But this is an honoured Qurʾān</p> <p>22. [Inscribed] in a Preserved Slate.</p> |
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¹⁷⁶⁵ *Al-Burūj*: The Great Stars. Also explained as “the planets” or their “high positions in the heaven.”

¹⁷⁶⁶ Or “May they be destroyed” or “cursed.” The “companions of the trench” (or ditch) were agents of a tyrannical king who refused to allow his people to believe in God. Their evil deed in obedience to their ruler earned for them the curse of God.

¹⁷⁶⁷ After casting the believers into a trench filled with fire, they sat at its edge, watching them burn to death. This event occurred before the time of Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁷⁶⁸ Or, in this instance, the literal meaning of “burned” is also appropriate.

¹⁷⁶⁹ See footnote to 2:19.