
Sūrah 88: al-Ghāshiyah

Period of Revelation

The whole subject matter of the Sūrah indicates that this too is one of the earliest Sūrahs to be revealed; but this was the period when the Prophet had started preaching his message publicly, and the people of Makkah were hearing it and ignoring it carelessly and thoughtlessly.

Theme and Subject Matter

To understand the subject matter well one should keep in view the fact that in the initial stage the preaching of the Prophet mostly centered around two points which he wanted to instill in the people's minds: Tawhid and the Hereafter: and the people of Makkah were repudiating both. Let us now consider the subject matter and the style of this Sūrah.

At the outset, in order to arouse the people from their heedlessness, they have been plainly asked: "Do you have any knowledge of the time when an overwhelming calamity will descend?" Immediately after this details of the impending calamity are given as to how the people will be divided into two separate groups and will meet separate ends. One group of the people will go to Hell and they will suffer punishment; the second group will go to the sublime Paradise and will be provided with blessings.

After thus arousing the people the theme suddenly changes and the question is asked: Do not these people, who frown and scorn the teaching of Tawhid and the news of the Hereafter being given by the Qur'an, observe the common things which they experience daily in their lives? Do they never consider how the camels, on whom their whole life activity in the Arabian desert depends, came into being, endowed precisely with the same characteristics as were required for the beast needed in their desert life? When they go on their journeys, they see the sky, the mountains, or the earth. Let them ponder over these three phenomena and consider as to how the sky was stretched above them, how the mountains were erected and how the earth was spread beneath them? Has all this come about without the skill and craftsmanship of an All-Powerful, All-Wise Designer? If they acknowledge that a Creator has created all this with great wisdom and power and that no one else is an associate with Him in their creation, why then do they refuse to accept Him alone as their Lord and Sustainer? And if they acknowledge that God had the power to create all this, then on what rational ground do they hesitate to acknowledge that God also has the power to bring about Resurrection, to recreate man, and to make Hell and Heaven?

After making the truth plain by this concise and rational argument, the address turns from the disbelievers to the Prophet and he is told: "If these people do not acknowledge the truth, they may not; you have not been empowered to act with authority over them, so that you should coerce them into believing; your only task is to exhort, so exhort them. Ultimately they have to return to Us; then We shall call them to full account and shall inflict a heavy punishment on those who do not believe."

Sūrah 88: al-Ghāshiyah¹⁷⁷⁸

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

1. Has there reached you the report of the Overwhelming [event]?
2. [Some] faces, that Day, will be humbled,
3. Working [hard] and exhausted.¹⁷⁷⁹
4. They will [enter to] burn in an intensely hot Fire.
5. They will be given drink from a boiling spring.
6. For them there will be no food except from a poisonous, thorny plant
7. Which neither nourishes nor avails against hunger.
8. [Other] faces, that Day, will show pleasure.
9. With their effort [they are] satisfied
10. In an elevated garden,
11. Wherein they will hear no unsuitable speech.¹⁷⁸⁰
12. Within it is a flowing spring.
13. Within it are couches raised high
14. And cups put in place
15. And cushions lined up
16. And carpets spread around.
17. Then do they not look at the camels - how they are created?
18. And at the sky - how it is raised?
19. And at the mountains - how they are erected?
20. And at the earth - how it is spread out?
21. So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder.
22. You are not over them a controller.
23. However, he who turns away and disbelieves -
24. Then God will punish him with the greatest punishment.
25. Indeed, to Us is their return.
26. Then indeed, upon Us is their account.

¹⁷⁷⁸ *Al-Ghāshiyah*: The Overwhelming, one of the names of the Resurrection.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Another accepted meaning is “They were working hard and exhausted,” i.e., doing deeds during worldly life which did not benefit them since they were not accompanied by faith or done for the acceptance of God.

¹⁷⁸⁰ i.e., any insult, falsehood, immorality, idle or vain talk, etc.