

## Sūrah 91: ash-Shams

### Period of Revelation

The subject matter and the style show that this Sūrah too was revealed in the earliest period at Makkah at a stage when opposition to the Prophet had grown very strong and intense.

### Theme and Subject Matter

Its theme is to distinguish the good from the evil and to warn the people, who were refusing to understand this distinction and insisting on following the evil way, of the evil end.

In view of the subject matter this Sūrah consists of two parts. The first part consists of v. 1-10, and the second of v. 11-15. The first part deals with three things:

1. That just as the sun and the moon, the day and the night, the earth and the sky, are different from each other and contradictory in their effects and results, so are the good and the evil different from each other and contradictory in their effects and results; they are neither alike in their outward appearance nor can they be alike in their results.
2. That God after giving the human self powers of the body, sense and mind has not left it uninformed in the world, but has instilled into his unconscious by means of a natural inspiration the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, and the sense of the good to be good and of the evil to be evil.
3. That the future of man depends on how by using the powers of discrimination, will and judgment that God has endowed him with, he develops the good and suppresses the evil tendencies of the self. If he develops the good inclination and frees his self of the evil inclinations, he will attain to eternal success, and if, on the contrary, he suppresses the good and promotes the evil, he will meet with disappointment and failure.

In the second part, citing the historical precedent of the people of Thamūd, the significance of Apostleship has been brought out. A Messenger is raised in the world, because the inspirational knowledge of good and evil that God has placed in human nature is by itself not enough for the guidance of man, but on account of his failure to understand it fully man has been proposing wrong criteria and theories of good and evil and thus going astray. That is why God sent down clear and definite Revelation to the Prophets (peace be upon them) to augment man's natural inspiration so that they may expound to the people as to what is good and what is evil. Likewise, the Prophet Sālih was sent to the people of Thamūd, but the people overwhelmed by the evil of their self, had become so rebellious that they rejected him. And when he presented before them the miracle of the she camel, as demanded by themselves, the most wretched one of them, in spite of his warning, hamstrung it, in accordance with the will and desire of the people. Consequently, the entire tribe was overtaken by a disaster.

While narrating this story of the Thamūd nowhere in the Sūrah has it been said - O people of Quraysh, if you rejected your Prophet, Muhammad, as the Thamūd had rejected theirs, you too would meet with the same fate as they met. The conditions at that time in Makkah were similar to those that had been created by the wicked among the people of Thamūd against the Prophet Sālih. Therefore, the narration of this story in those conditions was by itself enough to suggest to the people of Makkah how precisely this historical precedent applied to them.

**Sūrah 91: ash-Shams**<sup>1799</sup>

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

1. By the sun and its brightness
2. And [by] the moon when it follows it
3. And [by] the day when it displays it<sup>1800</sup>
4. And [by] the night when it covers [i.e., conceals] it
5. And [by] the sky and He who constructed it
6. And [by] the earth and He who spread it
7. And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it<sup>1801</sup>
8. And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness,
9. He has succeeded who purifies it,
10. And he has failed who instills it [with corruption].
11. Thamūd denied [their prophet] by reason of their transgression,
12. When the most wretched of them was sent forth.<sup>1802</sup>
13. And the messenger of God [i.e., Sālih] said to them, “[Do not harm] the she-

camel of God or [prevent her from] her drink.”

14. But they denied him and hamstrung<sup>1803</sup> her. So their Lord brought down upon them destruction for their sin and made it equal [upon all of them].
15. And He does not fear the consequence thereof.<sup>1804</sup>

<sup>1799</sup> *Asb-Shams*: The Sun.

<sup>1800</sup> The earth. Also interpreted as the sun. The same applies to the following verse.

<sup>1801</sup> i.e., balanced and refined it, creating in it sound tendencies and consciousness.

<sup>1802</sup> To hamstring the she-camel which had been sent by God as a sign to them.

<sup>1803</sup> And then killed.

<sup>1804</sup> God is not asked about what He does, but His servants will be asked. See 21:23.