

Sura 89: Al-Fajr (The Dawn)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 30:

1. *By the Dawn,*
2. *And the ten nights,*
3. *And the even and the odd,*
4. *And the night as it departs,*
5. *Is there, in this, an oath for a rational man?*
6. *Have you considered how did your Lord deal with (the tribe of) A'ad,*
7. *Of the (city of) Iram, with lofty pillars,*
8. *The like of which was not created in the land;*
9. *And with the (tribe of) Thamud, who carved rocks in the valley;*
10. *And with Pharaoh, the owner of the stakes?*
11. *They all transgressed all bounds in the land,*
12. *And spread corruption therein.*
13. *Therefore, did your Lord pour on them a scourge of torment.*
14. *Your Lord is ever watchful.*
15. *As for humankind, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honor and makes him lead an easy life, he says, "My Lord has honored me."*
16. *But when He tries him, restricting his subsistence for him, then he says, "My Lord has humiliated me."*
17. *No indeed, you do not honor orphans,*
18. *Nor do you urge one another to feed the poor,*
19. *And you devour inheritance with greed,*
20. *And you love wealth with inordinate love.*
21. *No indeed, when the earth is pounded and crushed,*
22. *And your Lord comes, and the angels, rank upon rank,*
23. *And Hell, that Day, is brought near, on that Day will humankind remember, but how will that remembrance profit him?*
24. *He will say, "Would that I had sent forth (good deeds) for (this) my life?"*
25. *For, on that Day, no one will torment as He torments,*
26. *And no one will bind as He binds.*
27. *But as for you, reassured soul,*
28. *Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing,*
29. *So enter among My servants,*
30. *And enter into My garden.*

This Sura has been revealed in Mecca. Hawwa suggests that the Sura consists of three sections. The first section is comprised of the first fourteen verses. It provides a warning and admonition for people. The second section is comprised of verses fifteen to twenty. This section describes some of the traits of humankind; and their attitudes towards affluence and adversity. The third section is comprised of verses twenty-one to thirty. The section describes very briefly the punishment for the disbelievers and the reward for the believers.

“By the Dawn, and the ten nights, and the even and the odd, and the night as it departs, is there in this an oath for a rational man?” The Sura starts with an oath using gentle and familiar scenes. Dawn is the beginning of the daily life, a time for ease, happiness, and friendship. There are several narrations about the meaning of the ten nights. It may be a reference to the first ten nights of the month of Zul-Hijja, the first ten nights of the month of Muharram, or the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan. The fact that the Sura did not specify which ten nights were meant makes the mystery more effective and intriguing. Only God knows which ten nights are referred to in this verse; but God has chosen these nights and attached special significance to them. The even and the odd refer to the prayer; this brings the spirit of worship to the scene. Then the night that departs as if it were a living creature. These are not mere words but they are like the soft breeze that massages the conscious to evoke in it feelings of appreciation of the beauty of nature. These oaths lead to a rhetorical question, *“Is there, in this, an oath for a rational man?”* This oath should be convincing to anyone who is able to think.

“Have you considered how did your Lord deal with (the tribe of) A'ad, of the (city of) Iram, with lofty pillars, the like of which was not created in the land; and with the (tribe of) Thamud, who carved rocks in the valley; and with Pharaoh, the owner of the stakes? They all transgressed all bounds in the land, and spread corruption therein. Therefore, did your Lord pour on them a scourge of torment. Your Lord is ever watchful.” This style which uses a questioning format is more effective in attracting the attention. The questions were posed to the Prophet (PBUH) initially, but they are also addressed to everyone. Using the term, *“Your Lord,”* is a form of endearment, which was meant to reassure the Muslims who were being persecuted in Mecca at the time.

The verses brought together the stories of the tyrants who were known in the old history. The verses outlined, how God destroyed them all when they transgressed and spread corruption in the land. God is ever watching. He sees people, holds them accountable, and rewards or punishes according to accurate standards that do not err nor inflect injustice on any one.

“As for humankind, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honor and makes him lead an easy life, he says, ‘My Lord has honored me.’ But when He tries him, restricting his subsistence for him, then he says, ‘My Lord has humiliated me.’” This is the human perception of how God treats people. The humankind does not have the proper understanding of the rationale behind God’s trials. He thinks that his provision is closely related to his status in the sight of God. If he gets a bigger provision, he thinks that this is a sign that God has chosen him. But when his provision is restricted, he thinks that he is being punished. He is mistaken on both counts. Restricting the provision is a test in perseverance. Enlarging the provision is a test in expressing gratitude. A person whose heart is devoid of belief does not understand the rationale behind restricting or enlarging the provision. But people whose hearts are full of faith they understand the rationale. They try to cope with the trials in either case, because they understand that trials, whether by affluence or adversity, are amply rewarded by God. They feel secure in both cases because they know that whatever they are facing, has been decreed by God.

“No indeed, you do not honor orphans, nor do you urge one another to feed the poor, and you devour inheritance with greed, and you love wealth with inordinate love.” No, it is not as you think that the condition of provision is related to one’s status in the sight of God. But you do not endeavor to do the things that please God. You do not honor the orphan nor do you urge each other to feed the needy. You devour inheritance and you love wealth passionately. These bad characters were prevalent in the Meccan society before Islam. The verses condemned such behavior and urged people to rid themselves of these vices.

“No indeed, when the earth is pounded and crushed, and your Lord comes, and the angels, rank upon rank, and Hell, that Day, is brought near, on that Day will humankind remember, but how will that remembrance profit him? He will say, ‘Would that I had sent forth (good deeds) for (this) my life?’ For, that Day, no one will torment as He torments, and no one will bind as He binds.” These verses describe scenes from the Day of Judgment as a warning. The earth will be pounded and crushed as part of the cataclysm that will accompany the Day of Judgment. The coming of God and the angels is part of the unseen. But it fills the heart with awe and fear. The same can be said about bringing Hell near. On that Day the heedless will regret the lost opportunity, but it will be too late.

In the midst of this horrific scenes, there will be tranquil and secure souls. These are the souls of those who were referred to in Surat al-Ghashiya, *“On that Day other faces will be radiant”*. They will be addressed by the Divine host, *“But as for you reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing, so enter among My servants, and enter into My garden.”* The verse describes a scene of serenity, mercy, and security.