

Sura 85: Al-Buruj (The Constellations)

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

Verses 1 to 22:

1. *By the sky, with its constellations;*
2. *And by the promised Day;*
3. *And by the witness, and the witnessed;*
4. *Cursed were the makers of the ditch,*
5. *The fuel-fed fire,*
6. *When they sat by it,*
7. *And were themselves the witnesses of what they did to the believers.*
8. *Their only grievance against them was that they believed in God, the Eminent, the Praised;*
9. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And God is Witness over all things.*
10. *Those who persecute the believers, men and women, and do not turn in repentance will have the torment of Hell. And they will have the torment of the burning Fire.*
11. *For those who believe and do righteous deeds will be Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. That is the great achievement.*
12. *Truly, the punishment of your Lord is severe.*
13. *It is He who originates and reproduces,*
14. *And He is the All-Forgiving, the Most Loving;*
15. *The Glorious Lord of the Throne,*
16. *Doer of what He wills.*
17. *Has the story of the hosts reached you?*
18. *Of Pharaoh and Thamud?*
19. *And yet the disbelievers persist in denial.*
20. *But God is encompassing over them.*
21. *It is a glorious Qur'an,*
22. *In a guarded tablet.*

This short Sura displays the basic principles of the doctrine. These are principles that emit far reaching lights. The main subject of this Sura is the story of the people of the ditch. A group of believers, before the time of Islam (it was said that they were Christians who believed in the Oneness of God), were being persecuted by their enemies. These enemies were oppressing tyrants. They tried to force them to relinquish their faith, but the believers persevered. The oppressors dug a ditch in the ground and they lit a huge fire inside the ditch. The believers were killed when the oppressors threw them in the ditch. The whole town was gathered to witness the incident. The Sura thus presents an admonition to the people and a support for the believers.

The Sura consists of two sections. The first section is comprised of the first eleven verses. This section narrates the story of the people of the ditch. The section ends with two verses; the first outlines the punishment for the oppressors and the second details the reward for the believers. The second section is comprised of the verses from 12 to 22. The section reminds people of the power of God and admonishes them to believe before it is too late. This section represents an admonition for people and a promise of God's support for the believers.

The Sura begins with an oath, "*By the sky, with its constellations; and by the promised Day; and by the witness, and the witnessed.*" The Arabic word for constellations may actually mean the

huge constellations in the sky alternatively it could mean the positions that the planets take as they move around in their orbits. The promised day is the Day of Judgment. On that day the deeds will be presented and they will be witnessed by everyone who will then be witnesses.

The narrative then moves to describe briefly the incident, *“Cursed were the makers of the ditch, the fuel-fed fire, when they sat by it, and were themselves the witnesses of what they did to the believers. Their only grievance against them was that they believed in God, the Eminent, the Praised. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And God is Witness over all things.”* The Sura starts by cursing the oppressors. They have committed a heinous crime. They dug the ditch and lit a huge fire inside it. They were sitting watching as the believers were thrown into the fire. The only crime that the believers committed was that they believed in God. They believed in God, the Eminent, the Praised. He has the power to do whatever He wills and He deserves to be praised in all situations and conditions. He is a witness to what the believers suffered. The incident shows an example of the perseverance of the believers. They were willing to sacrifice their lives for their faith.

This incident is not the first, nor will it be the last incident of persecution to be committed against the believers. The believers will always be subject to persecution and oppression. Unless the oppressors repent to God they will be punished in the same way, *“Those who persecute the believers, men and women, and do not turn in repentance will have the torment of Hell. And they will have the torment of the burning Fire.”*

The believers will be rewarded, *“For those who believe and do righteous deeds will be Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. That is the great achievement.”*

“Truly, the punishment of your Lord is severe.” It is appropriate to mention God’s punishment here to send a message to the oppressors that their power is negligible in comparison with God’s power. It is He who originates and reproduces, *“It is He who originates and reproduces.”* The processes of originating and reproducing extend beyond the first creation and the resurrection to include the ever continuous processes of originating and reproducing.

God is, *“the All-Forgiving, the Most Loving.”* He accepts the repentance of people. His grace is limitless. The servants would give anything for a word of encouragement from their human masters. Compare this to a word of encouragement from the, *“Glorious Lord of the Throne.”* Who does what He wills, *“Doer of what He wills.”* There is no comparison. What is more valuable than the love of God which He bestows on one of His servants?

“Has the story of the hosts reached you? of Pharaoh and Thamud?” These are long stories which have been narrated in details elsewhere. But here their mention is simply a reminder of their fates.

What happened to them is an example of how the Divine will was turned into action. God destroyed Pharaoh and his army and saved the Children of Israel. God established the Children of Israel in the land for a period of time to perform His will. God willed that the people of Saleh (PBUH) be completely destroyed and that Saleh (PBUH) and those who believed with him be saved. These are examples of how God saved the believers from the oppression of the disbelievers. This was a good lesson for the believing few in Mecca at that time.

“And yet the disbelievers persist in denial. But God is encompassing over them.” The disbelievers are always in denial. They are heedless of God’s power and knowledge.

This is a glorious Qur’an, *“It is a glorious Qur’an, in a guarded tablet.”* The Qur’an has been kept in the Guarded Tablet.