

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SÚRAT *Al-Balad*, 90.

This is an early Makkan revelation, and refers to the relation (by divine sanction) of the holy Prophet with the city of Makkah. He was born in that City, which had already been sacred for ages before. He was nurtured in that City and had (to use a modern phrase) the freedom of that City, belonging, as he did, to the noble family which held the government of its sacred precincts in its hands. But he was an orphan, and orphans in his day had a poor time. But his mind was turned to things divine. He protested against the prevailing idolatry and sin, and his parent City persecuted him and cast him out. He made another City, *Yathrib*, his own: it became the *Madinat-un-Nabī*, the City of the Prophet, and it has ever since been called *Madinah*. We can speak of *Madinah* as the Prophet's child. But the Prophet ever cherished in his heart the love of his parent City of Makkah, and in the fulness of time was received in triumph there. He purified it from all idols and abominations, re-established the worship of the One True God, overthrew the purse-proud selfish autocracy, restored the sway of the righteous (people of the Right Hand), the liberty of the slave, and the rights of the poor and downtrodden. What a wonderful career centring round a City? It becomes a symbol of the world's spiritual history.

Al-Balad, or The City

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.*

1. Nay I do swear by⁶¹³⁰
This City;—
2. And, thou art an inhabitant⁶¹³¹
Of this City;—
3. And the begetter
And that he begot;—⁶¹³²
4. Verily We have created
Man into toil and struggle.⁶¹³³

سُورَةُ الْبَلَدِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَا أَقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ ١

وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ ٢

وَالِدٍ وَمَوْلَدٍ ٣

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ ٤

6130. The appeal to the close ties between the holy Prophet and his parent City of Makkah has been explained in the Introduction to this Sūra. It is a symbol of man's own history. Man is born for toil and struggle, and this is the substantive proposition in verse 4 below, which this appeal leads up to.

6131. *Hillun*: an inhabitant, a man with lawful rights, a man freed from such obligations as would attach to a stranger to the city, a freeman in a wider sense than the technical sense to which the word is restricted in modern usage. The Prophet should have been honoured in his native city. He was actually being persecuted. He should have been loved, as a parent loves a child. Actually his life was being sought, and those who believed in him were under a ban. But time was to show that he was to come triumphant to his native city after having made Madinah sacred by his life and work.

6132. A parent loves a child; ordinarily the father is proud and the mother, in spite of her birth-pains, experiences supreme joy when the child is born. But in abnormal circumstances there may be misunderstanding, even hatred between parent and child. So Makkah cast out her most glorious son, but it was only for a time. Makkah was sound at heart; only her power had been usurped by an ignorant autocracy which passed away, and Makkah was to receive back her glory at the hands of the son whom she had rejected but whom she welcomed back later. And Makkah retains for all time her sacred character as the centre of Islam.

6133. Cf. "Man is born unto troubles as the sparks fly upward" (Job, v. 7); "For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief" (Ecclesiastes, ii. 23). Man's life is full of sorrow and vexation; but our text has a different shade of meaning: man is born to strive and struggle; and if he suffers from hardships, he must exercise patience, for Allah will make his way smooth for him (lxv. 7; xciv. 5-6). On the other hand no man should boast of worldly goods or worldly prosperity (see verses 5-7 below).

5. Thinketh he, that none
Hath power over him?⁶¹³⁴

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَنْ يَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ ۝

6. "He may say (boastfully):
Wealth have I squandered
In abundance!"⁶¹³⁵

يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَا لَا بَدَأَ ۝

7. Thinketh he that none
Beholdeth him?⁶¹³⁶

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ ۝

8. Have We not made
For him a pair of eyes?—

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ ۝

9. And a tongue,⁶¹³⁷
And a pair of lips?

وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ ۝

10. And shown him
The two highways?⁶¹³⁸

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ ۝

6134. See the end of last note. If a man has wealth, influence, or power, he should not behave as if it is to last for ever, or as if he has no responsibility for his acts and can do what he likes. All his gifts and advantages are given to him for trial. Allah, Who bestowed them on him, can take them away, and will do so if man fails in his trial.

6135. The man who feels no responsibility and thinks that he can do what he likes in life forgets his responsibility to Allah. He boasts of his wealth and scatters it about, thinking that he can thus purchase the support of the world. For a time he may. But a rude awakening must come soon, for he bases his hopes on unsubstantial things. Or if he spends his substance on self-indulgence, he is weakening himself and putting himself into snares that must destroy him.

6136. Allah watches him, and sees all his acts and motives, and all the secret springs of his follies. But lest he should think the higher forces too remote for him, let him look within himself and use the faculties which Allah has given him. See the next verses following.

6137. The eyes give us the faculty of seeing, and may be taken in both the literal and the metaphorical sense. In the same way the tongue gives us the faculty of tasting in both senses. Along with the lips, it also enables us to speak, to ask for information and seek guidance, and to celebrate the praises of Allah.

6138. The two highways of life are: (1) the steep and difficult path of virtue, which is further described in the verses following, and (2) the easy path of vice and the rejection of Allah, referred to in verses 19-20 below. Allah has given us not only the faculties implied in the eyes, the tongue, and the lips, but has also given us the judgment by which we can choose our way; and He has sent us Teachers and Guides, with Revelation, to show us the right and difficult way.

11. But he hath made not haste
On the path that is steep.⁶¹³⁹
12. And what will explain
To thee the path that is steep?—
13. (It is:) freeing the bondman;⁶¹⁴⁰
14. Or the giving of food
In a day of privation⁶¹⁴¹
15. To the orphan
With claims of relationship,⁶¹⁴²
16. Or to the indigent
(Down) in the dust.⁶¹⁴³
17. Then will he be⁶¹⁴⁴
Of those who believe,
And enjoin patience, (constancy,

فَلَا أَفْزَحِمُ الْعَقَبَةَ ﴿١١﴾

وَمَا أَذْرِيكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ ﴿١٢﴾

فَكَرْبَةً ﴿١٣﴾

أَوْ أَطْعَمْتَنِي يَوْمَ ذِي مَسْغَبٍ ﴿١٤﴾

يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبٍ ﴿١٥﴾

أَوْ مَسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبٍ ﴿١٦﴾

ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَصَّوْا

6139. In spite of the faculties with which Allah has endowed man and the guidance which He has given him, man has been remiss. By no means has he been eager to follow the steep and difficult path which is for his own spiritual good. Cf. Matt. vii. 14: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it".

6140. The difficult path of virtue is defined as the path of charity or unselfish love, and three specific instances are given for our understanding: viz. (1) freeing the bondman, (2) feeding the orphan, and (3) feeding the indigent down in the dust.

6141. Feed those who need it, both literally and figuratively; but do so especially when there is privation or famine.

6142. All orphans should be fed and helped. But ordinary orphans will come under the indigent in verse 16 below. The orphans related to us have a special claim on us. They should be near and dear to us, and if charity begins at home, they have the first claim on us.

6143. Persons down in the dust can only be helped from motives of pure charity, because nothing can be expected of them—neither praise nor advertisement nor any other advantage to the helper. Such help is help indeed. But there may be various degrees, and the help will be suited to the needs.

6144. Such practical charity and love will be the acid test of Faith and the teaching of all virtues. The virtues are summed up under the names of Patience (the Arabic word includes constancy and self-restraint) and compassionate kindness. Not only will they be the test by which the sincerity of their Faith will be judged; they will be the fruit which their Faith will constantly produce.

And self-restraint), and enjoin
Deeds of kindness and compassion.

18. Such are the Companions
Of the Right Hand.⁶¹⁴⁵

19. But those who reject
Our Signs, they are
The (unhappy) Companions
Of the Left Hand.⁶¹⁴⁶

20. On them will be Fire
Vaulted over (all round).

يَا صَبِرْ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ ﴿١٧﴾

أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ ﴿١٨﴾

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنَّا بَيْنَهُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ ﴿١٩﴾

عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّؤَصَّدَةٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

6145. Cf. lvi. 27-40, also n. 5223. They will be those who achieve salvation.

6146. Cf. lvi. 41-56, also n. 5223. They will be the unfortunate ones enveloped in the Fire of lasting Penalty, heaped over them and all round them.