

**INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT *Ash-Shams*, 91.**

This is one of the early Makkan revelations. Beginning with a fine nature passage, and leading up to man's need of realising his spiritual responsibility, it ends with a warning of the terrible consequences for those who fear not the Hereafter.

*Ash-Shams, or The Sun.*

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

1. By the Sun<sup>6147</sup>  
And his (glorious) splendour;
2. By the Moon<sup>6148</sup>  
As she follows him;
3. By the Day as it<sup>6149</sup>  
Shows up (the Sun's) glory;
4. By the Night as it  
Conceals it;
5. By the Firmament<sup>6150</sup>



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا ①

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَاهَا ②

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰهَا ③

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰهَا ④

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَىٰهَا ⑤

6147. Six types are taken in three pairs, from Allah's mighty works in nature, as tokens or evidence of Allah's providence and the contrasts in His sublime creation, which yet conduce to cosmic harmony (verses 1-6). Then (verses 7-8) the soul of man, with internal order and proportion in its capacities and faculties, as made by Allah, is appealed to as having been endowed with the power of discriminating between right and wrong. Then the conclusion is stated in verses 9-10, that man's success or failure, prosperity or bankruptcy, would depend upon his keeping that soul pure or his corrupting it.

6148. The first pair is the glorious sun, the source of our light and physical life, and the moon which follows or acts as second to the sun for illuminating our world. The moon, when she is in the sky with the sun, is pale and inconspicuous; in the sun's absence she shines with reflected light and may metaphorically be called the sun's vicegerent. So with Revelation and the great Prophets who brought it; and the minor Teachers who derive their light reflected, or perhaps doubly reflected, from the original source.

6149. The next contrasted pair consists, not of luminaries, but conditions, or periods of time, Day and Night. The Day reveals the sun's glory and the Night conceals it from our sight. So there may be contrasts in our subjective reception of divine light, but it is there, working all the time, and must reappear in its own good time.

6150. The next contrasted pair is the wonderful firmament on high, and the earth below our feet, stretching away to our wide horizons. The sky gives us rain, and the earth gives us food. Yet both work together: for the rain is moisture sucked up from the earth, and the food cannot grow without the heat and warmth of the sun. There are many other contrasts under this head; yet they all point to unity.

And its (wonderful) structure;<sup>6151</sup>

6. By the Earth  
And its (wide) expanse:
7. By the Soul,  
And the proportion and order  
Given to it;<sup>6152</sup>
8. And its inspiration  
As to its wrong  
And its right;-
9. Truly he succeeds  
That purifies it,
10. And he fails  
That corrupts it!<sup>6153</sup>
11. The Thamūd (people)  
Rejected (their prophet)  
Through their inordinate  
Wrong-doing.<sup>6154</sup>

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَعْنَهَا ﴿٦﴾

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ﴿٧﴾

فَالْهَمَّهَا نُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ﴿٨﴾

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ رَزَّكَهَا ﴿٩﴾

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا ﴿١٠﴾

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا ﴿١١﴾

6151. The *mā maṣḍariya* in Arabic, in this and the subsequent clauses, is best translated in English by nouns. Thus what would literally be "and the (wonderful) making or construction of it" or "the fact of its (wonderful) construction" is, idiomatically, "its (wonderful) structure." "The (wide) spreading out" of the earth is rendered "its (wide) expanse," and so on.

6152. Allah makes the soul, and gives it order, proportion, and relative perfection, in order to adapt it for the particular circumstances in which it has to live its life. Cf. xxxii. 9. See also n. 120 to ii. 117. He breathes into it an understanding of what is sin, impiety, wrong-doing and what is piety and right conduct, in the special circumstances in which it may be placed. This is the most precious gift of all to man, the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong. After the six external evidences mentioned in verses 1-6 above, this internal evidence of Allah's goodness is mentioned as the greatest of all. By these various tokens man should learn that his success, his prosperity, his salvation depends on himself,—on his keeping his soul pure as Allah made it; and his failure, his decline, his perdition depends on his soiling his soul by choosing evil.

6153. This is the core of the Sūra, and it is illustrated by a reference to the story of the Thamūd in the following verses.

6154. The allusion to the story of the Thamūd will be understood by a reference to vii. 73-79; see specially n. 1044. Their prophet was Ṣāliḥ, but he had to deal with an arrogant people, who oppressed the poor and denied them their rights of watering and pasture for their cattle.

12. Behold, the most wicked  
Man among them was  
Deputed (for impiety).<sup>6155</sup>

إِذْ أُنْبِئَتْ أَشْقَاهَا ﴿١٢﴾

13. But the messenger of Allah<sup>6156</sup>  
Said to them: "It is  
A She-camel of Allah!  
And (bar her not  
From) having her drink!"

فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا ﴿١٣﴾

14. Then they rejected him  
(As a false prophet),  
And they hamstrung her<sup>6157</sup>  
So their Lord, crushed them  
For their sin and  
Levelled them.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا فَدَمْدَمَ  
عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَسَوَّاهَا ﴿١٤﴾

15. And for Him<sup>6158</sup>  
Is no fear  
Of its consequences.

وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا ﴿١٥﴾

6155. The prophet Sâlih was given a certain she-camel as a Sign, a test case, "This she-camel of Allah is Sign unto you: so leave her to graze in Allah's earth and let her come to no harm, or ye shall be seized with a grievous punishment" (vii. 73). But they plotted to kill her and sent the most wicked man among them to dare and do that deed of impiety. It was probably when she came to drink at the stream that she was hamstrung and killed. See xxvi. 155, and liv. 27.

6156. That is, Sâlih: see last note.

6157. The man who was deputed to do the impious deed of hamstringing the she-camel had of course the sympathy and co-operation of the whole people. Only he was more daring than the rest.

6158. This verse has been variously construed. I follow the general opinion in referring the pronoun "Him" to "their Lord" in the last verse and the pronoun "its" to the Punishment that was meted out to all, high and low, equally. In that case the meaning would be: God decreed the total destruction of the Thamûd; in the case of creatures any such destruction might cause a loss to them, and they might fear the consequences of such loss or destruction, but Allah has created and can create at will, and there can be no question of any such apprehension in His case. An alternative view is that "him" refers to the prophet Sâlih, mentioned in verse 13. Then the interpretation would be: Sâlih had no fear of the consequences for himself; he had warned the wicked according to his commission; he was saved by Allah's mercy as a just and righteous man, and he left them with regrets (vii. 79). Yet another alternative refers "him" to the wicked man (mentioned in verse 12) who hamstrung the she-camel: he feared not the consequences of his deed.