

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT *Al-Burāj*, 85.

This is one of the earlier Makkan Sūras, chronologically cognate with S. xci. The subject-matter is the persecution of Allah's votaries. Allah watches over His own, and will deal with the enemies of Truth as He dealt with them in the past.

Al-Burūj, or The Zodiacal Signs.

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

1. By the Sky, with⁶⁰⁵¹
Its constellations;⁶⁰⁵²
2. By the promised Day
(Of Judgment);⁶⁰⁵³
3. By one that witnesses,
And the subject of the witness;—⁶⁰⁵⁴
4. Woe to the makers
Of the pit (of fire);⁶⁰⁵⁵



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ ﴿١﴾

وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ ﴿٢﴾

وَشَهِيدٍ مُّشْهُودٍ ﴿٣﴾

قُلْ أَصْحَابُ الْأَحْدُودِ ﴿٤﴾

6051. Here is an appeal to three Signs in verses 1-3, and the substantive proposition is in verses 4-8, a denunciation of wicked persecutors of the votaries of Allah, persecutors who burnt righteous men for their Faith. The three Signs are: (1) the Glorious Sky, with the broad belt of the Constellations marking the twelve Signs of the Zodiac; (2) the Day of Judgment, when all evil will be punished; and (3) certain Persons that will be witnesses, and certain Persons or things that will be the subjects of the witness. See the notes following.

6052. See n. 1950 to xv. 16. The Stars of the Zodiac as well as of other Constellations are like the eyes of the Night. It may be that crimes are committed in the darkness of the night. But countless eyes are watching all the time, and every author of evil will be brought to book.

6053. The Day of Judgment, when the Sinner will have to give an account of every deed, open or hidden, is not merely a matter of speculation. It is definitely promised in revelation, and will inevitably come to pass. Woe then to the Sinners for their crimes.

6054. The literal meaning is clear, but its metaphorical application has been explained in a variety of ways by different Commentators. The words are fairly comprehensive, and should, I think, be understood in connection with Judgment. There the Witnesses may be: (1) the Prophets (iii. 81); Allah Himself (iii. 81, and x. 61); the Recording Angels (l. 21); the Sinner's own misused limbs (xxiv. 24); his record of deeds (xvii. 14); or the Sinner himself (xvii. 14). The subject of the witness may be the deed or crime, or the Sinner against whom the testimony cries out. The appeal to these things means that the Sinner cannot possibly escape the consequences of his crime. He should repent, seek Allah's Mercy, and amend his life.

6055. Who were the makers of the pit of fire in which they burn people for their Faith? The words are perfectly general, and we need not search for particular names, except by way of illustration. In ancient history, and in Mediæval Europe, many lives were sacrificed at the stake because the victims did not conform to the established religion. In Arab tradition there is the story of Abraham: Nimrūd tries to burn him to death, but =

5. Fire supplied (abundantly)
With Fuel:

النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوَقُودِ ﴿٥﴾

6. Behold! they sat⁶⁰⁵⁶
Over against the (fire),

إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ ﴿٦﴾

7. And they witnessed
(All) that they were doing
Against the Believers.

وَهُمْ عَلَى مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ ﴿٧﴾

8. And they ill-treated them
For no other reason than
That they believed in Allah,
Exalted in Power,
Worthy of all Praise!—

وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ

الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٨﴾

9. Him to Whom belongs
The dominion of the heavens
And the earth!
And Allah is Witness
To all things.⁶⁰⁵⁷

الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٩﴾

10. Those who persecute
The Believers, men and women,
And do not turn
In repentance, will have
The Chastisement of Hell:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمَّا تَبَيَّنُوا

فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٠﴾

= on account of Abraham's Faith, the fire became "a means of safety for Abraham": xxi. 69, and n. 2725. Another case cited is that of Zu-Nuwās, the last Himyarite King of Yemen, by religion a Jew, who persecuted the Christians of Najrān and is said to have burnt them to death. He seems to have lived in the latter half of the sixth Christian century, in the generation immediately preceding the Prophet's birth in 570 A.D. While the words are perfectly general, a reference is suggested to the persecution to which the early Muslims were subjected by the Pagan Quraish. Among other cruelties, they were stripped, and their skins were exposed to the burning rays of the Arabian summer sun.

6056. The persecutors sat calmly to gloat over the agonies of their victims in the well-fed fire.

6057. It is suggested that the persecutors will richly deserve to be punished in the Fire of Hell. That Punishment will be far more real and lasting than the undeserved cruelty which they inflicted on men for their Faith in the One True God.

They will have the Chastisement
Of the Burning Fire.⁶⁰⁵⁸

11. For those who believe
And do righteous deeds,
Will be Gardens.⁶⁰⁵⁹
Beneath which Rivers flow:
That is the great Triumph.⁶⁰⁶⁰
12. Truly strong is the Grip
Of thy Lord.
13. It is He Who Creates
From the very beginning,⁶⁰⁶¹
And He can restore (life).
14. And He is the Oft-Forgiving,
Full of loving-kindness,
15. Lord of the Throne,
Full of all glory,
16. Doer (without let)⁶⁰⁶²
Of all that He intends.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ
تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿١١﴾

إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾

إِنَّهُ هُوَ يَدِي وَيُعِيدُ ﴿١٣﴾

وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْودُودُ ﴿١٤﴾

ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ ﴿١٥﴾

فَعَالٌ لِمَآ يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾

6058. The "Chastisement of the Burning Fire" has been mentioned here in addition to the "Penalty of Hell". This assumes a special significance in the background of the cruel burning of the Faithful by the "makers of the pit". These criminals would be duly retributed by being subjected to a similar kind of suffering that they had caused their innocent victims.

6059. Cf. v. 119, ix. 72 and xxii. 19.

6060. Cf. v. 119, n. 833.

6061. For the various words for "Creation" and the ideas implied in them, see n. 120 to ii. 117.

6062. Allah's Will is itself the Word and the Deed. There is no interval between them. He does not change His mind. No circumstances whatever can come between His Will and the execution thereof. Such are His Power and His Glory. Compare it with that of men, described in the next two verses.

17. Has the story
Reached thee,
Of the Forces—⁶⁰⁶³

هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكَ حَدِيثَ الْجُنُودِ ﴿١٧﴾

18. Of Pharaoh
And the Thamūd?

فِرْعَوْنَ وَثَمُودَ ﴿١٨﴾

19. And yet the Unbelievers
(Persist) in rejecting
(The Truth)!⁶⁰⁶⁴

بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبٍ ﴿١٩﴾

20. But Allah doth
Encompass them
From behind!⁶⁰⁶⁵

وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

21. Nay, this is
A Glorious Qur-ān,

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ ﴿٢١﴾

22. (Inscribed) in
A Tablet Preserved!⁶⁰⁶⁶

فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

6063. In contrast to the real, all-embracing, and eternal power of Allah, what are the forces of man at their best? Two examples are mentioned. (1) Pharaoh was a proud monarch of a powerful kingdom, with resources and organisation, material, moral, and intellectual, as good as any in the world. When he pitted himself against Allah's Prophet, he and his forces were destroyed. See lxxix. 15-26. (2) The Thamūd were great builders, and had a high standard of material civilization. But they defied the law of Allah and perished. See vii. 73-79, and n. 1043.

6064. In spite of the great examples of the past, by which human might and skill were shown to have availed nothing when the law of Allah was broken, the unbelievers persist (in all ages) in defying that law. But Allah will know how to deal with them.

6065. Allah encompasses every thing. But the wicked will find themselves defeated not only in conditions that they foresee, but from all sorts of unexpected directions, perhaps from behind them, i.e., from the very people or circumstances which in their blindness they despised or thought of as helping them.

6066. "Inscribed in a Tablet Preserved", i.e. Allah's Message is not ephemeral. It is eternal. The "Tablet" is "preserved" or guarded from corruption: xv. 9: for Allah's Message must endure for ever. That Message is the "Mother of the book": see n. 347 to iii. 7.