

SURATUL-FIL

Introduction

This Surah was revealed in Makka. It has five verses. It is Surah number 105 in the Holy Qur'an.



“Al-Fil” means “The Elephant”. The name of the Surah comes from the mention of the army of elephants mentioned in the first verse. Some reports say that there was only one elephant.

In 570 AD, the year of the birth of our Prophet (S), a Christian governor by the name of Abraha marched to Makka to destroy the Holy Ka’ba. By destroying the Holy Ka’ba, Abraha wanted people to come instead to worship at a huge church he had built at San’a in Yemen. Abraha’s army also had elephants, which were a rare sight in Arabia. History calls this army “Ashabul Fil” or “The People of the Elephant”.

When he reached Makka, he captured some camels belonging to the chief of Makka, Abdul Muttalib, the grandfather of the Prophet (S). When Abdul Muttalib went to see him, Abraha thought he would ask him to spare the Holy Ka’ba. Instead, Abdul Muttalib asked for the camels to be returned.

Abraha laughed and said, “What! I have come to destroy your place of worship, and you are speaking of your camels!” Abdul Muttalib gave a famous reply, **“I am the owner of the camels, so I have come for them. The Ka’ba too has an Owner, Who will look after it”**

This statement showed that the ancestors of the Prophet (S) were also firm in their faith in Allah.

Abraha ignored this warning and tried to invade the Holy Ka’ba with his elephants. The Surah recounts what happened to the army.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Alláh, the Beneficent, the Merciful

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ ﴿١﴾

Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the fellows of the Elephant?

أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضْلِيلٍ ﴿٢﴾

Did He not cause their plan to fail?

وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ ﴿٣﴾

He sent down upon them flocks of birds,

تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ ﴿٤﴾

Pelting them with stones of baked clay,

فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ ﴿٥﴾

And leaving them like straw, eaten up (by cattle).

Tafsir

Ayah 1. The proud army was crushed by small birds carrying little stones in their beaks and claws. Each stone fell on target, killing men and animals instantly. Allah shows how the power displayed by Abraha was defeated by the smallest of His creatures.

Ayah 2. The verse refers to the great confusion caused in the army of Abraha by the arrival of the birds. Many fell dead, and the survivors, including Abraha, began to run away.

Ayah 3,4. The birds were tiny, yet their effect was great, because they had the help of Allah.

Ayah 5. The appearance of the remains of the army after the birds had gone, was like straw that has been chewed by cows, broken and useless.

Merits of Reciting Suratul Fil

1. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (AS) said that one who recites this Surah in his Wajib prayers will receive good testimony on his behalf from the earth on which he used to say the prayers, and he will enter Paradise without reckoning. Some commentators have said that such extra-ordinary rewards will not be granted to just anybody but only to the sincere ones, those who are seek knowledge and who act upon their knowledge.

2. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (AS) has written in his own handwriting: "When you face your foe, you ought to look at him and recite Suratul Fil."

References

Holy Qur'an, Tafsir of S V Mir Ahmed Ali

Ramadhan, Ahkam and Philosophy, Yasin T. Al Jibouri

Islamic Laws, Ayatullah `Ali as-Sistani, Rules 987.