

SŪRAH 99
Al-Zalzalah
(The Earthquake)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.

When the earth is rocked by her [final] earthquake, (1)

when the earth shakes off her burdens, (2)

and man asks: 'What is the matter with her?' (3)

On that day she will tell her news, (4)

for your Lord will have inspired her. (5)

On that day people will come forward, separated from one another, to be shown their deeds. (6)

Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it then, (7)

and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it then also. (8)

إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا ﴿١﴾

وَأُخْرِجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَنْقَالَهَا ﴿٢﴾

وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا ﴿٣﴾

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُخَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا ﴿٤﴾

بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا ﴿٥﴾

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٦﴾

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ ﴿٧﴾

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ ﴿٨﴾

Overview

According to some reports, this *sūrah* is a Madinan revelation, but other reports suggest that it was revealed in Makkah. The latter reports seem to be more valid, because the *sūrah's* mode of expression and subject matter are more in line with the style and subjects of Makkan *sūrahs*.

The *sūrah* makes a violent wake-up call to drowsy hearts; the subject matter, scene drawn and rhythm all contributing to the effect of this jolt. It is a powerful blast that makes the earth and all that is on it quake and tremble. Men hardly recover their senses when they find themselves confronted with the reckoning, weighing and evaluating of actions and deeds. They immediately receive their recompense. All this is expressed in just a few short phrases, which is characteristic of this part of the Qur'ān as a whole and forcefully portrayed in this particular *sūrah*.

The Results of a Life's Work

When the earth is rocked by her [final] earthquake, when the earth shakes off her burdens, and man asks: 'What is the matter with her?' On that day she will tell her news, for your Lord will have inspired her. (Verses 1-5)

It is the Day of Judgement when the firm earth trembles and quakes violently and yields up her long-carried loads of bodies and metals and other matters which have weighed heavily on her. It is a scene that makes every firm and solid object under the feet of the listeners shake and totter. They think themselves to be staggering and toddling along and the earth beneath them shuddering and quaking. It is a scene which separates one's heart from everything on earth it clings to, assuming it to be firm and everlasting. The Qur'ān imparts to these scenes a kind of movement which is transmitted almost to the very sinews of the listener. Such immediate impact is all the more forceful because man is portrayed as confronting and reacting to it all: "*And man asks: 'What is the matter with her?'*" (Verse 3)

It is the question advanced by one who is bewildered, astonished, surprised and puzzled, who sees something unfamiliar, encounters what is imperceptible, and beholds what makes him impatient and agitated. o he blurts out: What is the matter with her? What is quaking and shaking her so violently? He cries as he reels and staggers, trying to hold on to anything which may support or keep him upright. But all around him waver and totter violently.

Man has experienced earthquakes and volcanoes which have filled him with awe and terror, and have brought to him ruin and destruction. But when man witnesses

the quake of the Day of Resurrection he will see no similarity between it and the earthquakes and volcanoes of this world. He neither knows its secrets, nor does he remember anything similar to it. It is something dreadful, taking place for the very first time.

“On that day”, when this quake occurs, leaving man entirely shaken, “she will tell her news, for your Lord will have inspired her.” (Verses 4-5) This earth will then tell her news, describe her condition and what has happened to her. It will all have been brought about simply because ‘your Lord has inspired her,’ ordered her to shake and quake so fiercely and shake off her burdens. She obeys only the Lord’s orders ‘in true submission!’ (84: 5) She will relate her news because what will take place is a simple and clear account of what lies behind it of God’s orders and inspiration to the earth.

At this point when man is astonished, puzzled and crying out, and as the rhythm gasps with dread and terror, surprise and wonder, tottering and shuddering, crying out: What is the matter with her? What has happened to her? – at this point he encounters the scene of resurrection, reckoning, weighing and recompense. *“On that day people will come forward, separated from one another, to be shown their deeds. Whoever does an atom’s weight of good shall see it then, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil shall see it then also.” (Verses 6-8)*

In the twinkling of an eye we behold people rising from their graves. *“On that day people will come forward, separated from one another.” (Verse 6) We behold them issuing forth from all over the globe: “as if they were swarming locusts.” (54: 7) This scene is also unknown to man, it is something unprecedented, unique in nature. “On that day, the Earth will split asunder and they will come out in haste.” (50: 44) Wherever you look you behold a ghost hurrying away, caring for nothing and never looking back or turning his head left or right. They all are “rushing to the summoner,” (54: 8), with their heads down and their eyes staring forward, “for each one of them will on that day have enough preoccupations of his own.” (80: 37) It is a scene indescribable in human language. It is both ghastly and astonishing. All these adjectives and all their synonymous and analogous terms cannot describe it. It would be better conceived with a stretch of imagination and contemplation within the limits and capacity of our minds.*

“On that day people will come forward, separated from one another, to be shown their deeds.” (Verse 6) This is far more terrible and dreadful. People go to where they will be shown their deeds. They have to face their deeds and their rewards or punishments.

Encountering one’s own deeds may, sometimes, be far more severe than any other punishment. Man sometimes does things which he avoids even thinking about when he is alone.

In a spell of repentance and remorse, man may even turn his face from some of his deeds because they are so ghastly. o, in what condition will he be on that day when he faces his deeds in front of all mankind and in the presence of God Almighty? It is a terrible and frightful punishment, although it is only that they are shown their deeds and have to confront their labours. However, following this confrontation comes the accurate reckoning which does not leave out an atom's weight of good or evil. *"Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it then, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it then also."* (Verses 7-8)

"An atom's weight!" Early commentators on the Qur'ān explain this phrase as "a mosquito" or "a particle of dust" which can only be seen when exposed to sunlight. These were the smallest things they could think of, and which may be referred to as an atom. But now we know that the word 'atom' refers to a definite thing which is much smaller than a particle of dust seen in sunlight. For the particle of dust can be seen by the human eye while it is impossible to see the atom, even with the help of the most powerful microscopes in modern laboratories. It is only conceived by scientists. None of them has seen it either with his own eyes or with his microscope. All that they have seen is its effects.

This atom, or what is similar to it in weight, whether good or bad, will be brought forth and shown to its doer, who will then receive its reward. At that time man does not undervalue any of his actions and deeds, whether good or bad. He does not say, "Oh, this is a trivial thing which has no weight or consideration." On the contrary, his conscience will be as sensitive to everything he has done as an accurate scale registering even the weight of an atom favourably or unfavourably. There is nothing parallel or similar to this measure in this world, except the heart of a believer. Such a heart is sensitive to even an atom's weight of either good or evil.

But there are some hearts in this world which are unmoved even by mountains of sin and crime. They remain unaffected while suppressing fountains of goodness which are far firmer than mountains. These hearts are conceited on this earth but on the Day of Judgement they are crushed under their own burdens.