

## Surah al-Fil (105)

## سورة الفيل

### 'The Elephant'

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word *fil*, meaning elephant. Like the other Makkan surahs it deals with matters of faith. Whereas the subject of the previous surah was Allah's chastisement of the disbelievers in the hereafter, this surah talks of His punishment of them in this world.

*By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Beginning *By the name of Allah*, who comprehends all the qualities of perfection.

*the Compassionate, the Merciful*, who bestows His mercy on every one.

*Have thou not seen how thy Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? (1)*

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ ﴿١﴾

That is, have you not heard, O Messenger, or O listener, how your Lord treated the companions of the elephant who came to destroy the Ka'bah. He treated them with chastisement and destruction.

*Did he not put their plot astray? (2)*

أَلَمْ تَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضَلُّلٍ ﴿٢﴾

That is, bring it to nothing. As if instead of being guided to its end, which was to destroy the Ka'bah and extinguish the light of Allah, their plot went astray, and bequeathed to them destruction and annihilation.

*And sent against them birds, swallows; (3)*

وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ ﴿٣﴾

'Swallows' is put for *ababil*, a type of swallow; but the word also means flocks, either scattered or grouped together.

*They stoned them with stones of petrified earth, (4)*

تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ ﴿٤﴾

The birds pelted them with small, hard stones made of petrified earth, the severest and hardest thing that could hit a person.

*So He made them like chewed husks. (5)*

جَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ ﴿٥﴾

Allah made the associates of the elephant like a grass-plant, its seeds eaten, its empty, dry husk remaining. For when the stones struck a person they rendered him empty, like a seedcase, its seed eaten.

The event behind this was that a group from the Quraysh went to trade in the territory of the king of Abyssinia. They travelled until they approached the coast where they came upon a sanctified Christian shelter, called by the Quraysh 'al-Haykal'. They set down there and gathered wood for a fire and cooked their meat. When they departed they left the fire as it was, on a gusty day. The wind took up the fire and the little church burned down. The king became angry with this and sent Abrahah with a force to destroy the Ka'bah. Abrahah brought an elephant with his troops. When they brought it to the door of the mosque, 'Abd al-Mutḥalib said to the elephant, 'Do you know why they have brought you?' The elephant signified with its head to say no. 'Abd al-Mutḥalib then said to it, 'They have brought you to destroy the house of Allah; will you do it?' Again the elephant signified with its head to say no. Then the army struggled to get the elephant inside but it resisted. So they attacked it with swords and cut it. Then Allah sent his army of birds in wave after wave, who stoned them; for each bird had three stones, one in its beak and one in each of its claws. The birds hovered with wings flapping over the heads of the soldiers and propelled the stones at their heads. The stones entered the top of their heads and came out of their posteriors, and their bodies collapsed.