Week 4: Tafsir of Surah Fil: Part I

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OVERVIEW

This lesson is about the tafsir of Surah Fil. This is the first of the final ten surahs of the Qur’an, and it contains 5 verses. Since these are usually the most-widely recited surahs in salah, it will be beneficial to delve into the deeper meanings.

Part I: Background of Surah Fil

- Surah Fil is a story of how Allah protected the Kaaba from Abraha, an arrogant tyrant who intended to destroy it.
- Abraha’s people were known as Ashaab ul Fil (people of the elephant).
- Thousands of years ago, Prophet Ibrahim (may Allah give him peace) had announced to the people to come for pilgrimage. Allah upheld this and guided people to it even after his death.
- Kaaba has a replica of it in the first heaven. 70,000 angels visit it everyday.
- Kaaba is often referred to as the house of Allah. This is not meant in the literal sense, as no house is capable of containing Allah in it.

ABRAHA’S STORY

In the same year of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and give him peace)’s birth, Kaaba had become a beacon for attention in the Arabian Peninsula. Thousands of pilgrims visited it, because they still revered Prophet Ibrahim (may Allah give him peace)’s legacy.

Unfortunately, a few people were jealous because of its rise to fame. One such person was Abraha, an arrogant leader.
The chief tribe for maintaining the Kaaba was Quraysh. As they were famous for protecting it, they had come to enjoy the upper hand over other tribes in terms of respect, privileges, etc. This made them an even bigger target for malice and hatred.

This event was also a precursor for the Prophet’s advent. If attempting to destroy Allah’s House ensures punishment, what about attempting to destroy Allah’s Messenger?

**Part II: Story of Surah Fil**

- Abraha was a tyrannical ruler of Yemen. He was of Christian faith.
- Due to his jealousy, he built a grand church in San’aa to distract pilgrims from going to Hajj.
- It was dishonored twice, which greatly angered Abraha.
- He then set out to destroyed Kaaba with an army of 60,000.
- He used elephants as weapons to confuse Arabs.
- After a brief resistance, he reached an area called “Maghmas” outside Makkah.
- Once there, he captured 200 camels that belonged to Abdul Muttalib, the grandfather of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace). He was a respected person at the time.
- An emissary was sent. When Abdul Muttalib arrived to meet Abraha, the latter was shocked at his respectable demeanor.
- Abdul Muttalib requests his camels back and is granted his camels back. Then, some other Quraysh leaders try to negotiate a deal in vain.
- Everyone returned to Makka and made a very special dua, then retreated to the mountains in fear of Allah’s punishment.
- Abraha’s elephants refuse to proceed to the Kaaba
- A giant flock of tiny birds, which covered the entire sky, pelted the army of Abraha with stones.
- Majority passed away, but some escaped (including Abraha). Allah wanted him to suffer a painful death.

The purpose of Surah Fil was to remind the Quraysh of this event. They had seen it not too long ago. How could they still deny the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace)?
Part III: Translation of Surah Fil

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

Has he not turned their plan into futility?

And He sent upon them flying birds in flocks?

Throwing upon them stones of baked clay