

SŪRAH 104

Al-Humazah

(The Slanderer)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

Woe to every taunting, slandering backbiter; (1)

*who amasses wealth and keeps counting it again
and again, (2)*

*thinking that his wealth will make him
immortal. (3)*

*By no means! He will indeed be flung into the
crushing one. (4)*

*Would that you know what the crushing one is!
(5)*

It is God's own kindled fire, (6)

which will rise over people's hearts. (7)

It will close in upon them, (8)

in towering columns. (9)

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ ﴿١﴾

الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ ﴿٢﴾

يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ ﴿٣﴾

كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ ﴿٤﴾

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ ﴿٥﴾

نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمَوْقَدَةُ ﴿٦﴾

الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ ﴿٧﴾

إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّوَصَدَةٌ ﴿٨﴾

فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ ﴿٩﴾

Despicable Character

This *sūrah* portrays a real scene from the early days of the Islamic message, yet the same scene is repeated in every environment and society. It shows a vile, mean person who is given wealth and who uses it to tyrannize others, until he begins to feel himself almost unbearable. He thinks that wealth is the supreme value in life, before which all other values and standards come toppling down. He feels that since he possesses wealth, he controls other people's destiny without being accountable for his own deeds. He imagines that his money and his wealth is a god, capable of everything without exception, even of resisting death, making him immortal and stopping God's judgement and His retribution.

Deluded as he is by the power of wealth, he counts it and takes pleasure in counting it again and again. A wicked vanity is let loose within him driving him to mock other people's positions and dignity, to taunt and slander them. He criticizes others verbally, mocks them with his gestures, either by imitating their movements and voices or by ridiculing their looks and features, by words and mimicry, by taunt and slander.

It is a vile and debased picture of someone devoid of human ideals and generosity and stripped of faith. Islam despises this type of person whose characteristics are diametrically opposed to its own high standards of morality. Islam emphatically forbids mockery and ridicule of other people as well as deliberate fault-finding. But in this case the Qur'an describes these actions as sordid and ugly, delivering a stern warning to anyone who indulges in them. This suggests that the *sūrah* is referring to an actual case of some unbelievers subjecting the Prophet and the believers to their taunts and slander. The reply to these actions comes in the form of a strong prohibition and awesome warning. There are some reports which name specific individuals as being the slanderers meant here, but these are not authentic, so we will not discuss them, but instead content ourselves with general observations.

The warning comes in the form of a picture of the hereafter portraying the mental and physical suffering there and drawing an image of hell which is both palpable and telling. It takes care to relate the crime to the punishment inflicted and to its effect on the culprit. On the one side there is the image of the taunting, slandering backbiter who mocks and ridicules others while he gathers wealth thinking that he is guaranteed immortality in this way. This image of a cynical calumniator seeking power through wealth is contrasted with the slighted, ignored person flung into a crushing instrument which destroys all that comes in its way. It soon crushes his

structure and his pride.

The crushing instrument is *"God's own kindled fire."* (Verse 6) Its identification as the fire of God suggests that it is an exceptional, unfamiliar sort of fire, full of terror. This fire 'rises' over the person who mocks and ridicules others. To complete the image of the slighted, ignored and crushed person, the fire closes in on him from all directions and locks him in. None can save him and none asks about him. Inside he is tied to a column, as animals are tied, without respect.

The tone of the vocabulary used in this *sūrah* is very strong *'Keeps counting it again and again; by no means! He will indeed be flung; rises, towering.'* By such expressions, forcefulness is emphatically conveyed: *"He will indeed be flung into the crushing one. Would that you know what the crushing one is! It is God's own kindled fire."* (Verses 4-6) First comes the generalization and cryptic expression, then the exclamation suggesting great horror, and then the clear answer – all are forms of forceful expression. The style also conveys warnings: *'Woe to...; He will be flung into...; The crushing one...; God's kindled fire; which will rise over people's hearts, it will close in upon them; in towering columns.'* In all this there is a kind of harmony between imagery and feelings and the actions of the *'taunting, slandering backbiter.'*

At the time of its revelation, the Qur'ān followed up the incidents faced by the Islamic message whilst also leading it along its way. The Qur'ān is the infallible weapon which destroys the cunning of conspirators, shakes the hearts of enemies, and fills the believers with courage and determination to persevere. Indeed we recognize two significant facts in God's care here as He denounces this sordid type of people: firstly, we are shown the ugliness of moral decline and how people are rendered so abject. Secondly, we realize that He defends the believers, preserves their souls against their enemies' insults, shows them that God knows and hates what is inflicted on them, and that He will punish the wrongdoers. This is enough to elevate their souls and to make them feel their position high above the wicked designs of others.