

SURAH AS A STORY



Surah Al-Feel

The Elephant

The complete journey — the year the birds defeated an army —
told the way a loving elder shares it with a child



Surah No. 105 • 5 Ayahs • Meccan

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The Surah at a Glance

Alam tara kayfa fa'ala Rabbuka bi-as-haabil-feel

1. Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?

Alam yaj'al kaydahum fee tazleel

2. Did He not make their plot go astray?

Wa arsala 'alayhim tayran abaabeel

3. And He sent against them birds in flocks,

Tarmeehim bihijaaratim-min sijjeel

4. striking them with stones of hard clay,

Faja'alahum ka'asfim-ma'kool

5. And He made them like eaten straw.

Listen to the Arabic recitation of this Surah, ayah by ayah, with the Qari
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The Year of the Elephant

Beta, this surah tells of an event that happened about fifty days before the Prophet ﷺ was born — in the year the Arabs afterwards called 'Aam al-Feel', the Year of the Elephant. It was so significant that they dated their



calendar by it.

Here is what happened, as the historians and scholars of tafseer relate.

In Yemen there was a governor named Abrahah, ruling on behalf of the Abyssinian kingdom. He watched the Arabs travelling year after year to Makkah for pilgrimage to the Ka'bah, and it troubled him — all that honour, all that trade, all that attention going to a simple stone house in a barren valley.

So he built a magnificent cathedral in Sana'a — grand, decorated, beautiful — and announced that the Arabs should make their pilgrimage there instead. But the Arabs would not come. And it is reported that some Arab, out of anger, defiled the building.

Abrahah swore he would destroy the Ka'bah. He assembled an army and brought with it a war elephant — some reports say several — an animal the Arabs had never seen in battle, a living tank in an age of camels and swords. He marched north toward Makkah.



Beta, imagine the terror in Makkah. There was no army to face this. The Quraysh were merchants and tribesmen. When Abrahah's forces seized the livestock of the region — including two hundred camels belonging to Abdul-Muttalib, the Prophet's own grandfather — Abdul-Muttalib went to negotiate.

And here, beta, is the moment I want you to remember. Abrahah expected him to plead for the Ka'bah. Instead, Abdul-Muttalib asked for his camels back.

Abrahah was astonished and said: I thought better of you — you come to speak about your camels while I have come to destroy the House which is your honour and your fathers' religion?

And Abdul-Muttalib gave the answer that has echoed for fourteen centuries: 'I AM THE OWNER OF THE CAMELS. AND THE HOUSE HAS AN OWNER WHO WILL PROTECT IT.'

Beta, feel the faith in that sentence. He did not say 'we will fight you'. He did not gather a militia. He simply



stated a fact: this House belongs to Someone, and He is capable of defending His own property.

Have You Not Seen?

'A LAM TARA KAYFA FA'ALA RABBUKA
BI-AS-HABIL-FEEL — HAVE YOU NOT SEEN how your
LORD dealt with the COMPANIONS OF THE
ELEPHANT?'

Beta, notice the wording: 'have you not SEEN'. The Prophet ﷺ was not yet born when this happened. But the event was so well known, so witnessed, so recent — the survivors were still alive in Makkah, and the Arabs still spoke of it — that Allah addresses it as something seen.

And notice the choice of Name: 'RABBUKA' — YOUR Lord. Not just 'Allah' — the One who nurtures and protects YOU. Because the message being delivered to a persecuted Prophet ﷺ in Makkah was personal: the Lord who defended that House will defend you.



'A LAM YAJ'AL KAYDAHUM FEE TADLEEL — did He not make their PLOT go ASTRAY?'

Beta, 'tadleel' — He made their scheme wander, lose its way, come to nothing. All that planning: the elephant transported across seas and deserts, the supplies, the alliances, the years of preparation. And Allah made it wander into futility.

The narrations record that when the army reached the edge of Makkah and the elephant was turned toward the Ka'bah, it knelt and would not rise. They beat it; they drove iron hooks into it. Turn it toward Yemen — it would rise and run. Turn it toward Makkah — it knelt again.

Beta, an animal understood what an army of men refused to.

Birds and Small Stones

'WA ARSALA 'ALAYHIM TAYRAN ABABEEL — and He SENT against them BIRDS in FLOCKS — TARMEEHIM



BI-HIJARATIN MIN SIJJEEL — striking them with
STONES of hard baked CLAY — FA-JA'ALAHUM
KA-'ASFIN MA'KOOL — and He made them like EATEN
STRAW.'

Beta, stop and look at the contrast Allah has arranged
here, because it is the entire point of the surah.

On one side: the largest land animal on earth, a trained
army, imperial backing, and a plan years in the making.

On the other side: BIRDS. Small, weightless creatures.
And their weapons? Not fire from the sky, not an
earthquake, not a flood — little stones of baked clay.

And the result? 'Ka-'asfin ma'kool' — like straw that has
been eaten. Beta, picture the floor of a stable: chewed
stalks, broken, trampled, worthless, scattered in the dirt.
That was the imperial army by the end of the day.

Beta, understand what Allah is teaching. He could have
destroyed them with anything. He chose the SMALLEST
possible instrument — so that no one could ever say the



birds were powerful. The birds were nothing. The stones were nothing. Which leaves only one explanation for what happened.

That is His way throughout the Quran: a gnat for Nimrud, a wind for 'Aad, a shout for Thamud, a staff for Firaun's magicians. When Allah decides, He often uses something small on purpose, so that the power is unmistakably His.

Beta, remember this whenever you face something that looks overwhelming — an illness, an oppressor, a system, a debt, a person with power over your livelihood. The Owner of that House is your Lord too, and He has never needed large instruments.

Why This Surah, and Why Then

Beta, now think about WHY Allah revealed this surah to the Prophet ﷺ during the hard years of Makkah.

The Quraysh were persecuting him. They had numbers, wealth, and control of the city. And Allah reminded him



— and them: do you remember what happened to the last people who came at this House with an army? You yourselves date your calendar by it. Your fathers watched it.

And there is a deeper irony, beta, which the next surah completes: Allah protected the Ka'bah from Abrahah — and now the very people who lived in its shade, who prospered because of it, were persecuting the man calling them back to the worship of its Owner.

There is also a beautiful sign in the timing. This event happened in the year of the Prophet's ﷺ birth. Allah cleared and protected the House that would become the qiblah of his ummah, just weeks before the one who would purify it of idols was born. Beta, Allah prepares the ground long before the seed is visible.

And one final lesson, and it is the one to carry home: Abdul-Muttalib's words. 'The House has an Owner who will protect it.'



Beta, we exhaust ourselves defending things that belong to Allah — His deen, His Book, His House, His truth. We should certainly work and speak and strive. But the outcome was never on our shoulders. Do your part like Abdul-Muttalib did — he went, he spoke, he retrieved what was his responsibility — and then leave the House to its Owner.

Because the birds are always available.

What This Surah Teaches Us

- 1.** The Owner of the House protects His own — do your part, then trust Him with the outcome.
- 2.** A years-long imperial plan was made to 'wander' — no scheme succeeds against Allah's decision.
- 3.** Allah often chooses the smallest instrument on purpose, so the power is unmistakably His.
- 4.** The elephant knelt when men would not — heedlessness makes a person duller than an animal.



5. Whatever looks overwhelming to you today has a Lord who has never needed large instruments.

6. Allah prepares the ground long before the seed appears — the House was protected weeks before the Prophet's ﷺ birth.

7. Strive for the truth without carrying the weight of its outcome; that burden was never assigned to you.

Ya Allah, You who turned an army into eaten straw — protect us, and let us trust You with what belongs to You. Ameen.

— This is a simplified, faithful retelling for understanding, based on the Quran's translation and established tafseer (Ibn Kathir and others). For deeper study, always read with a qualified teacher. —

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