



THE PEOPLE OF THE ELEPHANT

The Emperor of Abyssinia had appointed Abraha bin Sabah Ashram as Governor of Yemen and sent him to Sana'ah, the capital city of Yemen. Abraha saw that the people of Yemen were sending their sacrificed offerings and gifts to the Sacred Ka'bah and this brought about malice in his heart. As an opposition to the Ka'bah and to try and divert the pilgrims of Makkah from the Holy Ka'bah, he ordered the construction of an enormous house in Sana'ah, made of marble and studded with jewels. The name given to this house was Qalees and he ordered the people of Yemen to make its tawaaf (circumambulation) etc. [*Tafseer Noorul Irfaan*]

Zubair bin Amr from Makkah, on finding an opportunity, filled this Qalees with human excreta. Thereafter, a caravan of people travelling from Makkah made a bonfire near this house. A spark from this fire got into Qalees and burnt it. [*Tafseer Noorul Irfaan*] This infuriated Abraha and he devised a plan to destroy the Holy Ka'bah with an army of elephants, just 55 days before the birth of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam). [*Zarqaani*]

Abraha and his army with the elephants travelled from Sana'ah to Makkah Mukarramah and camped at the Valley of Muhassar, three miles outside the holy city of Makkah. [*Tafseer Noorul Irfaan*] When his army had reached the city, his soldiers looted many camels and cattle of the Quraish, from which 200 to 400 had belonged to Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh), the grandfather of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam). [*Zarqaani*]

Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh) was saddened to hear of Abraha's action and approached him in his camp to discuss the matter. When Abraha came to know that the leader of the Quraish had come to meet with him, he immediately invited him to his tent. Seeing Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh), from whose forehead once shone the Noor of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam), Abraha became instantly impressed and descended from his throne in respect.

Making Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh) sit, he asked, "O Leader of the Quraish! For what reason do you come here?" He replied, "I have come to ask for the camels and cattle, which your soldiers have taken from us, to be returned." Abraha became surprised at this and said, "You are very peculiar and have lowered the respect that I had for you! I have come to destroy your Ka'bah, yet you speak only of your livelihood." Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh) replied, "I only come to discuss my property with you. The Ka'bah belongs to Allah Ta'ala, not me, and He will save what belongs to Him." Abraha then said, "Abdul Muttalib! I have definitely come to destroy every brick of it! I will decimate it to such an extent that it will seem like it never existed! I intend doing so because your people have made a mockery of my monument in Yemen and for this, I shall seek revenge!" The grandfather of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) replied, "Do as you wish. This will be between you and Allah Ta'ala. Who am I to plead with you not to do so?" After this, Abraha ordered for all the camels and cattle to be returned and these were taken back to Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh).

When Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh) arrived back home, he addressed the people by saying, "O People of Makkah! Take your belongings and go into the mountain's caves." He then departed to the Holy Ka'bah with a few of his family members and upon reaching it, grasped its doors and supplicated, "O Allah! Every individual certainly protects his house, so protect Yours and help Your people against the worshippers of the cross."

After this Dua, Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh) took his family towards the mountains in order to witness the Power of Allah Ta'ala. At the break of dawn, Abraha with his soldiers and elephants proceeded towards the Holy Ka'bah to carry out his plan. When they reached a place called Magmas, the elephant upon which Abraha rode suddenly sat down. It was prodded forward but remained motionless. As this occurred, a flock of green coloured sparrow-like birds appeared from the direction of Jeddah. Each bird carried three small stones of the size of a lentil, one in the beak and two in its two claws, to carry out the punishment of Allah Ta'ala. They began to strike the army of Abraha in a true display of the Power of Allah Ta'ala. [*Tafseer Roohul Bayaan; Seerat-e-Mustafa*]

It has been reported that every stone that fell upon a soldier crushed his head, pierced and tore through his body, cut through the elephant he was riding and made a hole in the ground. The birds were striking the stones at Abraha's soldiers with accurate aim, with full recognition of the stones as well as all the infidels, as they were delivering each stone to the infidel whose name was written on it, like a postman. [*Tafseer Noorul Irfaan*]

This left Abraha with no other option but to retreat and leave behind the pieces of their bodies dismembered from the pelting. In this manner, the Holy Ka'bah was saved by Allah Ta'ala from Abraha's plan. After the retreating of the army, Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (Radiallahu Ta'ala Anh) came down from the mountains and offered gratitude to Allah Ta'ala for this. This miracle of his became famous amongst all the Arab tribes, and they began to show more respect to him as one who is close and beloved to Allah Ta'ala. [*Seerat-e-Mustafa*]

Allah Ta'ala states in the Holy Qur'an regarding this incident, "O Beloved! Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the people of the elephant? Did He not cause their plan to fail? And He sent upon them flocks of birds. Striking them with stones of baked clay. And thus made them like broken straw, eaten up." [*Surah 105, Verses 1-5*]

A beautiful point about the status of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) becomes evident from this Surah. The incident of the 'People of the Elephant' had taken place prior to the birth of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam), yet the verb used in the first verse of this Surah is, "Did you not see?" This is a rhetorical question making the statement that Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) indeed saw. Here, the signs and effects of the incident are not intended because these signs had been obliterated before Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) had reached the age of discretion. Furthermore, Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) saw this event in detail and not in an abridged form, which is why the words 'What your Lord did' are not used but rather 'How your Lord dealt' is used. This event took place for the honour of Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam), and like he was seeing the events taking place prior to his birth, even after leaving this mundane world he is seeing all of the events. SubhanAllah! [*Tafseer Noorul Irfaan*]

Interestingly, Sufis use this incident of the 'People of the Elephant' as an analogy of our struggle with our Nafs. They state that the heart of the believer is like the Ka'bah, the lower self (Nafs-e-Ammarah) is like Abraha, evil friends and worldly arguments are the army and elephants of Abraha and Rasoolullah (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) is the ocean of mercy from where the Ababeel (birds) of divine guidance fly. The religiously prescribed worships are stones through which the Abraha of the lower self and his army are crushed and thereby the Ka'bah (heart) remains safe. [*Tafseer Noorul Irfaan*]

May Allah Ta'ala grant us the Taufeeq to seek knowledge of our Deen, Allahumma Ameen.