

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ ﴿١﴾

أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضَلُّيلٍ ﴿٢﴾

وَ أَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ ﴿٣﴾

تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ ﴿٤﴾

فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ ﴿٥﴾

1. *Have you not seen how your Rabb dealt with the people of the elephants?*
2. *Did He not lay their plans to waste...*
3. *...and send against them flights of birds...*
4. *...who pelted them with clay pebbles...*
5. *...making them look like eaten fodder?*

The word "feel" is an Arabic adaptation of the Persian word "peel", meaning "elephant". Because Arabic does not have a letter with a "p" sound, the closest equivalent is the "f" (called "faa" in Arabic). Therefore, the word "feel" is used. The "people of the elephants" refers to a person called **Abrahaa** and his army. Abrahaa was appointed by the king of Abyssinia to act as the governor of Yemen. When he was appointed as governor, he decided to build a temple which would be an architectural masterpiece to be revered by one and all. He desired that the Arabs abandon the Ka'bah in Makkah and pay homage to this "Yemeni Ka'bah". Consequently, he built a temple that was so tall that a person standing at the base was unable to see the top. He had the structure embellished with gold, silver and precious gems. He then made a proclamation that no one in Yemen should ever visit the Ka'bah in Makkah and that pilgrimage should now take place to his "Ka'bah".

Although the Arabs were idol-worshippers, the love and reverence for the Ka'bah had permeated their hearts.

Consequently, the Adnaan, Qahtaan and Quraysh tribes became extremely upset. **One night**, a member of the Maalik bin Kinanah tribe **defecated in Abrahaa's temple**. When Abrahaa learnt that it was a member of the Quraysh who did this, he swore to destroy their Ka'bah. When Abrahaa sought permission from the king of Abyssinia, the king gave him his blessings and even sent his special elephant called Mahmood. Mounted on this elephant, Abrahaa marched with an army of elephants to destroy the Ka'bah. He intended to raze the Ka'bah to the ground by fastening its pillars with iron chains tied to the elephants.

When the news of this planned attack on the Ka'bah spread, the Arabs prepared to defend the Ka'bah and raised a large army under the leadership of Dhu Nafar. However, Allaah Ta'ala did not desire that humans protect His Ka'bah. Therefore, Abrahaa crushed this resistance and took Dhu Nafar prisoner.

When Abrahah's army reached the settlement of the Banu Khath'am tribe, their leader Nufayl bin Habeeb led his entire tribe against the army but they were also defeated. Nufayl was taken prisoner. Although Abrahah intended to have him executed, he later changed his mind, thinking that they could use him as a guide.

When the army reached Taa'if, the Banu Thaqeef tribe living there decided not to resist him because they had already heard about the fate of those who had previously resisted the mighty army. They also feared that if they oppose Abrahah, he would destroy the temple they had erected in the name of their idol Laat. They therefore met with Abrahah and offered him the services of one of their leaders by the name of Abu Righaal. Abrahah accepted Abu Righaal's services as a guide and he led them towards Makkah. When the army reached a place called Maghmas, where the camels of the Quraysh grazed, Abrahah captured all the camels. *Among these camels were two hundred camels belonging to Rasulullaah (sallallahu-alayhi-wa-sallam)'s grandfather Abdul Muttalib.*

From this place, Abrahah dispatched his messenger Hanaata Himyari to meet with the Quraysh leaders and to inform them that he did not intend fighting the people of Makkah. He made it clear that none of the residents of Makkah would be harmed if they did not oppose him in his objective of destroying the Ka'bah. When Hanaata arrived in Makkah, everyone pointed him in the direction of Abdul Muttalib because he was regarded to be the most senior leader. When Hanaata conveyed Abrahah's message, Abdul Muttalib told him that they had no intentions of opposing Abrahah because they did not have the might. However, he made it clear that the Ka'bah is Allaah's house which Allaah's friend Hadhrat Ibraheem (A.S) had built. He told Hanaata that Allaah would protect the Ka'bah and that they could proceed with their plans if they were prepared to fight Allaah. Hanaata then insisted that Abdul Muttalib accompany him to meet Abrahah.

When Abrahah saw the handsome countenance of Abdul Muttalib, he descended from his throne and sat with Abdul Muttalib on the ground. Speaking through a translator, Abrahah asked Abdul Muttalib why he had come. Abdul Muttalib said that he had come for his camels which Abrahah's soldiers had captured. Abrahah said to Abdul Muttalib, "When I set my eyes on you, I had tremendous respect for you. However, I have lost all this respect now that you speak of your mere 200 camels knowing that I have come here to destroy your Ka'bah. You have said nothing about this." Abdul Muttalib said, "I am the owner of the camels and am concerned about them. I am not the owner of Allaah's house. The Master of the house knows how to protect His house."

Abrahah said, "Your God cannot protect it from me." "Then you do as you please," said Abdul Muttalib. According to certain narrations, some other leaders of the Quraysh were with Abdul Muttalib at that time. They proposed to Abrahah that if he left the Ka'bah to be, the entire Tihaama region would pay him a third of their crops annually. However, he refused this offer. He then returned Abdul Muttalib's camels to him. Taking his camels along with him, Abdul Muttalib returned to Makkah.

When he entered Makkah, he proceeded straight to the Ka'bah and, holding the ring of the door, he made du'aa to Allaah. A large group of the Quraysh joined him in the du'aa in which they entreated Allaah

Ta'ala to protect the Ka'bah because they did not have the strength to resist Abrahah's powerful army. After having supplicated to Allaah in all sincerity, Abdul Muttalib took all the people of Makkah to the neighbouring mountains because they were convinced that Allaah's punishment would seize Abrahah and his army.

The next morning, Abrahah prepared the army to march into Makkah. Nufayl bin Habeeb, whom Abrahah had taken prisoner earlier, took hold of the ear of *Abrahah's elephant Mahmood*. He said to the elephant, *"Return safely whence you came from because you are in Allaah's sacred city."* Upon hearing this, the elephant immediately sat down. Try as they might, the elephant's minders could not get him to stand. They even tried beating him with large iron spears and putting iron arrowheads in his trunk. However, he still would not walk towards Makkah. When they steered him in the direction of Yemen, he was prepared to walk. He was prepared to walk in every other direction besides the direction of the Ka'bah. It was then that *the army saw many flights of little birds approaching from the coast. Each bird carried three little pebbles the size of the gram seed or (according to other narrations) the size of lentils. Each bird carried one in its beak and one in each claw.*

Waaqidi (A.R) narrates that *the birds* (referred to as Abaabeel) *looked strange and had never been seen before. They were the size of pigeons with red claws.*

Hadhrat Sa'eed bin Musayyab (A.R) has mentioned *that the birds were green with yellow beaks.*

Hadhrat Ikrama (R.A) narrates that *the birds emerged from the ocean and had heads resembling animals.*

As the birds flew over Abrahah's army, they dropped their pebbles which packed more power than a bullet. They went straight through anything they struck and settled deep in the ground. Seeing this punishment, the elephants all dispersed and all but one were unharmed. All Abrahah's soldiers did not die immediately. Those who escaped died painful deaths as they tried to make their way back to Yemen. Allaah Ta'ala had sent little birds with little pebbles to destroy an army that many Arab tribes could not resist. On that occasion, Abrahah was afflicted with a horrible disease. A poison permeated his body and caused every joint to decay. By the time he was brought back to Yemen, his body was in pieces. He died there.

*Two of Mahmud's keepers settled in Makkah but both became blind and paralysed.* They were often seen begging from people. [The Tafseer of Allaama Ibn Katheer (A.R) Vol. 4 Pg. 549 and "Ma'aalimut Tanzeel" Vol. 4 Pg. 525]

This incident was witnessed by many people and it became a momentous event in Arab history. When referring to any event during that year, *the Arabs would say that it happened in the year of the elephants.*

Rasulullaah (sallallaahu-alayhi-wa-sallam) *was born in the same year, fifty days after the people of the elephants were destroyed.*

Because everyone was acquainted with the incident, Allaah Ta'ala speaks of the incident without introduction when He says, ***"Have you not seen how your Rabb dealt with the people of the elephants?"***

Allaah Ta'ala reminds the people of Makkah that He had been merciful to them when He protected the Ka'bah which had given them respect among the Arabs.

In this way, Allaah preserved their honour and esteem. Allaah asks them ***"Did He not lay their plans to waste and send against them flights of birds who pelted them with clay pebbles, making them look like eaten fodder?"***

It is the same Allaah who sent His final prophet Rasulullaah (sallallaahu-alayhi-wa-sallam) to the people of Makkah, thereby increasing their honour and the honour of the Ka'bah. It was therefore necessary for the people of Makkah to be grateful to Allaah for all these bounties.

Commentators mention that any miraculous event that took place before the coming of a Nabi (A.S) is called **"Irhaas"**.

A miraculous event that took place after the coming of a Nabi (A.S) is called **"Mu'jiza"**.

The incident of the elephants is therefore regarded as an "Irhaas" of Rasulullaah (sallallaahu-alayhi-wa-sallam). The incident was a sign to indicate that a notable personality will soon appear in the city of Makkah who will have a special attachment with the Ka'bah.

**NOTE:** The fact that Allaah Ta'ala sent many flights of birds indicates that Abrahama's army was very large. While there were many soldiers, there were only **eight to twelve elephants**. Although swallows are usually referred to as "Abaabeel", they are not implied in the verse. As explained earlier, **these birds were a type that appeared most strange**.

The word **"sijjeel"** (translated above as **"clay pebbles"**) is the Arabic version of the two Persian words "sangh" (stone) and "gill" (clay). They therefore refer to clay rolled into little balls and then baked to harden. **These were the same type of pebbles used to destroy the nation of Hadhrat Loot (A.S)**. These pebbles are neither as heavy nor as hard as stones broken off mountains. It is only by the power of Allaah that these stones could have had the devastating effect they did.

Allaama Qurtubi (A.R) narrates from Abu Saalih (A.R) that **he saw some of these pebbles in the house of Hadhrat Umm Haani (R.A)** the daughter of Abu Talib. He says that they were black in colour with red stripes across them.

Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Abbaas (R.A) has mentioned that tiny pimples developed on the parts of the bodies that the pebbles struck and that this was the beginning of small-pox. Allaah knows best.

