



## SURAH AL LAHAB

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ  
مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ  
سَيَصَلَّىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ  
وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ  
فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ

### *Brief Synopsis*

This Surah is in the condemnation and criticism of one of the Prophet's ﷺ most open and vehement enemies; the enemy who probably caused him the most hurt. Along with condemning him it also gives news of his (and his wife's) impending destruction in this and the next world.

### *Reason for revelation*

It was revealed in response to Abu Lahab's blasphemy which he perpetrated in front of the whole Quraysh when the Prophet ﷺ invited all of them to Islam:

When the Prophet ﷺ was ordered to openly invite people to Islam Allah ﷻ said 'Wanzur Asheera' takal Aqrabeen'. In fulfilment of this command the Prophet ﷺ ascended Mount Safa and called out to the Quraysh 'If I was to inform you that the enemy was to attack you in the morning or evening would you believe me?' They replied 'Yes'. So he said 'I warn you of a severe punishment'. On hearing this Abu Lahab said 'May you be destroyed, is this what you have gathered us for?' He then picked up a stone to throw at the Prophet ﷺ'. Upon this comment this Surah the revealed.<sup>1</sup>

In another narration it is narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said 'If I was to say to you that behind this mountain a battalion of your enemy was heading this way would you believe me?' They said 'Of course, we have heard only truth from your tongue' The Prophet ﷺ then warned 'I alert you that if you do not refrain from Shirk Allah's ﷻ punishment will destroy you' In response to this Abu Lahab, pointing his finger at the Prophet ﷺ, protested '*Tabban Laka Amaa Jamatana illa liHaa'za* (may you be destroyed, is this what you have gathered us for)? This blasphemy was unbearable for Allah ﷻ and in expression of His wrath and displeasure with Abu Lahab this Surah was revealed<sup>2</sup>.

### *Who was Abu Lahab?*

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<sup>1</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

<sup>2</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

Abu Lahab's real name was Abd'ul Izza<sup>3</sup> but he was better known as Abu Lahab – the one with sparkles or flames - due to his physique, beauty and sparkling face. Thus this was used because:

- 1) He was better known as Abu Lahab<sup>4</sup>
- 2) The name of Abdul Izza (servant of an idol) was too heinous, unfit for the Quran<sup>5</sup>.
- 3) It refers to his ultimate station in hell (literally Abu Lahab means man of fire<sup>6</sup>).

### *Why Abu Lahab?*

The Mufasireen have discussed the reason for Abu Lahab being singled out when there were equally as vociferous opponents of the Prophet ﷺ such as Abu Jahl? Why did the Quran take the trouble of mentioning this man by his name? Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran claims that this was because Abu Lahab was a source of greater pain for the Prophet ﷺ for where there is greater hope there is greater disappointment<sup>7</sup>. One could thus allude that Abu Lahab's mentioning was not because of his enmity of Islam but because of his enmity of the Prophet ﷺ.

Abu Lahab caused the Prophet ﷺ greater distress for a number of reasons:

- He was the Prophet's ﷺ Uncle: Abu Lahab was the brother of Abdullah and thus one would have expected him to have helped his nephew. All the other uncles of the Prophet ﷺ were his fathers half brothers
- He was the Prophet's ﷺ Neighbour: In Makkah Abu Lahab's house was next to the Prophet's ﷺ and the rights of neighbour are found in every society. Not only should he have honoured the rights of his neighbour but he was privy to the Prophet's ﷺ home life and should have been even more impressed by the life and character of the Prophet ﷺ. But instead of this he exploited this proximity; whenever the Prophet ﷺ was busy in worship Abu Lahab would throw parts of dead animals upon him. He would throw excrement and other filth into the Prophet's ﷺ kitchen. Abu Lahab's wife would go to the forest and gather thorns and sticks and carry them back on her head. In the night she would put them in the Prophet's ﷺ path so that when in the early morning he would leave the house for worship he would be caused discomfort<sup>8</sup>.
- He was the leader of the clan: In the society of that time the clan and tribe was central to everything. Clan allegiances superseded everything and the leader of the clan was expected to support clan members – even if he was wrong! Thus one would have expected Abu Lahab to have supported the Prophet ﷺ due to clan allegiances<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>4</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>5</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>6</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

<sup>7</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>8</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>9</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

- His son's divorced two of the Prophet's ﷺ daughters: Prior to the announcement of Prophethood two of the Prophet's ﷺ daughters, (Ruqayya & Kulthoom<sup>10</sup>, were married to two of Abu Lahab's sons, Utba and Umayyad. After Prophethood Abu Lahab ordered his two sons to divorce them and warned them that if they did not he would cut relations off with them. Furthermore Umayyad openly proclaimed that he rejected Allah ﷻ and even tried to spit on the Prophet ﷺ but it simply fell back on his own face. The Prophet ﷺ said 'Lord! Appoint one of your dogs upon him'. Thus whilst he was on a journey a lion ripped him apart but did not eat his meat or drink his blood.<sup>11</sup>

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ

May the two hands of Abu Lahab be destroyed, and they were destroyed!

Here Allah ﷻ is both giving a bad dua against Abu Lahab, stating that may he be destroyed and then He himself informs us that he was destroyed. So he gives the prophecy that Abu Lahab will be destroyed.

A bad Dua in Allah's ﷻ statement signifies His Wrath<sup>12</sup>. In other words Allah's ﷻ wrath is about to befall that person and then by stating that he was destroyed reinforces the message that the wrath will definitely befall him.

Tabbat تَبَّتْ denotes a great loss that ultimately leads to one's destruction.<sup>13</sup>

It is narrated that Tabbat تَبَّتْ is the same phrase used by Abu Lahab when he scolded the Prophet ﷺ at Mount Safa for calling the people to hear his preaching. He said "Tabban Laka, Amma Jama'tana illa li-Haa'za? (May you be destroyed Is this what you called us for?)" Consequently Allah ﷻ responds to him in the very same way<sup>14</sup>; in order that he and the entire world know the reason for his destruction; the blasphemy of the Prophet ﷺ.

يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ the two hands of Abu Lahab

The Mufasssireen have also discussed why the two hands of Abu Lahab have been mentioned. Allah ﷻ could have simply said 'May Abu Lahab be destroyed' so why specifically mention his two hands?

One view is that it was in direct response to his insult of the Prophet ﷺ for when he uttered the above words he pointed his finger at the Prophet ﷺ<sup>15</sup> and in addition it was with his hands that he intended to throw a stone at him<sup>16</sup>. Another is that his two hands actually

<sup>10</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>11</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>12</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>13</sup> Tafseer Mazhari whilst Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran quotes Qurtubi's that it means loss but has also been taken to mean – and destruction.

<sup>14</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>15</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>16</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

refer to his whole body<sup>17</sup> because the hands are the main part of one's body for they undertake all the deeds. Another is that two hands symbolise both realms; this duniya and the Akhirah<sup>18</sup> and that Abu Lahab had destroyed both of them.

وَنَبَّأَ And he was destroyed

After the bad dua Allah ﷻ gives news that he was destroyed and that nothing was left of him. This verse was revealed in Makkah but Abu Lahab died a week after the battle of Badr, some ten years later<sup>19</sup> but Allah ﷻ had used the past tense and stated that he had been destroyed. This past tense is informative for it was a prophecy of the Quran. Indeed it was also a very bold claim for Abu Lahab was physically and materially very strong and prophesising the destruction of such a person was a big claim and a great sign of the Quran's veracity.

The first two verses are in the past tense, although they refer to events which will, and actually did, occur in the future. The past tense has been used to denote the absolute surety that these events will take place. This Surah itself then became proof of the veracity of the Quran and the Prophet ﷺ when this Prophecy actually came true. 'This blessed surah is a mighty proof of the Prophet's ﷺ Prophethood because the news of their misfortune given here was just as it eventually happened.'<sup>20</sup>

*This prophecy came true.*

Within one week of hearing the news of the Kuffaar defeat at Badr, poisonous spots appeared on Abu Lahab's body and spread to the whole body. An ill-odoured peep began to flow and his skin began to fall off<sup>21</sup>. This illness was known by the Arabs as 'Adsa' and was considered contagious<sup>22</sup> so no one went near him and even his sons threw him out of the house and he died a painful death in the street. People feared the disease so much that even when he was dead his physical state was so bad that none of his relatives wanted to touch his body. It stayed in the street for 3 days and when the smell became strong the people ashamed his sons to do something. They employed Abyssinian slaves who dragged the body with wood and put it in a hole in the ground<sup>23</sup>.

This illness was known by the Arabs as 'Adsa' and was considered contagious and consequently even after his death no one touched his corpse for 3 days'.<sup>24</sup>

Dhiyaa ul Quran claims that this indignity can only be result of the wrath of Allah ﷻ for no offspring would expel their father from the house nor bear to see his body rotting in the street but the wrath of Allah ﷻ makes all emotions of love disappear from the hearts of

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<sup>17</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

<sup>18</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

<sup>19</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>20</sup> Tafseer Ibn Katheer

<sup>21</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>22</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>23</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>24</sup> One may view these 3 days as 'lying in state' giving the world the opportunity to see the fate of the Prophets enmity – compiler.

children. The whole of Makkah saw this prophecy which the Prophet ﷺ told from his Lord come true.<sup>25</sup>

**مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ** His wealth and earnings did not benefit him.

Allah ﷻ makes it clear that Abu Lahab's wealth and earnings will not be able to benefit him or save him from such destruction.

Abu Lahab was one of the four wealthiest people in Makkah. He had more than 8 kg of gold bricks. Alongside his wealth he had a number of full grown sons<sup>26</sup>. He used to boast and that even if the Prophet ﷺ was proclaiming the truth he would save himself in the hereafter by trading in his wealth and children<sup>27</sup>. However events showed that his wealth did not even benefit him in this world where wealth has some apparent value, so what benefit will it give in the hereafter where it is baseless!

The world saw that when the Allah's ﷻ wrath came after him all his wealth and son's left him and were of no use to him in his hour of need.<sup>28</sup>

Earnings here mean sons for their upbringing is the greatest investment of a man. The Prophet ﷺ said 'Eating from your earnings is the purest eating and your children are your earning'<sup>29</sup>

His مَالُهُ wealth refers to his inherited wealth and his earning is what he earned himself<sup>30</sup>

**سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ** Soon he will meet a flaming fire

Because of his blasphemy today soon he will meet and encounter taste a flaming fire<sup>31</sup> both in his grave and in Hell after Qiyaamah. Consequently Abu Lahab's station in hell is definite.<sup>32</sup>

**وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ** His wife, the one who carried firewood, will also meet the fire.

Abu Lahab's wife was also a fierce enemy of the Prophet ﷺ. So much so that she would go to the jungle and carry sticks on her head and place them in the Prophet's ﷺ path.<sup>33</sup> (n)

His wife's name was Arwa but known as Umm-e-Jameel and she was the sister of Abu Sufyaan. Her heart was brimming with hatred for the Prophet ﷺ. During the day she would

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<sup>25</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>26</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>27</sup> Tafseer Mazhari, narrated by Ibn Masud

<sup>28</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>29</sup> Tafseer Mazhari from Bukhaari's Taareekh and Tirmidhi

<sup>30</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>31</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

<sup>32</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Ifraan

<sup>33</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

go to the jungle and collect branches and thorns, cart them back on her head and at night she would place them in the Prophet's ﷺ path.<sup>34</sup>

This statement – referring to her as his wife - also reveals that the marriages between polytheists are valid even if they were not instituted by Islamic rules because Allah ﷻ has referred to Umm e Jameel as his wife. Consequently the children of kaafir are legitimate and can inherit from them<sup>35</sup>.

**حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ** The (feminine) carrier of firewood

Allah ﷻ Ta'aala has described Abu Lahab's wife as the carrier of firewood. The Mufasireen have explained it in a number of ways:

- It refers to the fact that she used to go to the forest and collect sticks, thorns and bring them back to put in the path of the Prophet ﷺ. Even though she had servants and slave-girls she would still go out to the jungle herself. This act was itself a punishment (and dishonour) for her in this world that the head in which there was such hatred for the Prophet ﷺ was made to carry wood here and in the next world.<sup>36</sup>
- This statement is in response to her taunting of the Prophet ﷺ over the fact that he was poor. This verse reminds her that although she who was supposed to be the wife of a wealthy man she still carried firewood back from the forest.<sup>37</sup>
- Refers to her practice of backbiting and going around the whole town with gossip and spreading enmity amongst the people. Consequently the firewood is a simile for her gossip and slander. This interpretation is narrated by Imams Qataada, Mujahid and Sadi.<sup>38</sup>
- Firewood refers to sins, because it is sins that will fuel the fire of hell. Thus Umm e Jameel is described as a carrier of sins.<sup>39</sup>

**فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ** Round her throat is a rope made of Camel hair

This is another description of Abu Lahab's wife that when carrying wood on her head she would tie the wood with a rope and wrap one end of it around her neck to stop the wood falling off.<sup>40</sup> Ibn Katheer states that it was made from camel hair and skin.

However this description may also refer to the fact that she had a great gold necklace as a sign of her position and wealth. Saeed bin Museeb stated that she used to have a beautiful

<sup>34</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran , Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>35</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>36</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

<sup>37</sup> Tafseer Ibn Katheer

<sup>38</sup> Tafseer Mazhari. Ibn Katheer also narrates this from Ibn Jareer

<sup>39</sup> Tafseer Mazhari from Saeed bin Jabeer

<sup>40</sup> Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

necklace and had stated that she would spend it in enmity of the Prophet ﷺ. Qataada also said that مَسْنَدٌ refers to a necklace.<sup>41</sup>

It was through this rope that she met her end. Sha'bi and Muqaatil states that one day whilst carrying the woodfire back she sat for a rest and angel came and strangled her with the rope she had tied around her neck.<sup>42</sup>

Both these descriptions of his wife don't just describe her but also insult and taunt her; despite being one of the wealthiest and powerful women in Makkah her enmity of the Prophet ﷺ led her to do what ordinary women did (carry firewood on their heads with the rope tied around her neck).<sup>43</sup> Consequently if this enmity caused her such disgrace in this world what will her state be in the next?!

Syeda Aisha narrates that when this surah was revealed this squint-eyed picked up a rock and came towards the Prophet ﷺ, who at the time was sitting by the Kabah alongside Abu Bakr Siddiq. When Abu Bakr saw he asked the Prophet ﷺ 'What if she spots you?' The Prophet ﷺ reassured him 'She won't see me' and began to recite the Quran. She came up to them and stood by Abu Bakr but could not see the Prophet ﷺ even though he was there too. She asked Abu Bakr 'Your friend has insulted me in his poetry' Abu Bakr said 'By God, he has not' and she left complaining 'The Quraysh know I am the daughter of a chief'.<sup>44</sup> Abu Bakr then asked the Prophet ﷺ 'Why was she not able to see you?' He explained that an angel had come and stood between her and him.<sup>45</sup>

A number of points are proven by this Surah<sup>46</sup> :

- The Prophet ﷺ answered the critics of Allah ﷻ and Allah ﷻ responded to the critics of the Prophet ﷺ. Answering the enemies of Allah ﷻ is a Prophetic Sunnah (act of the Prophet) whilst answering the enemies of the Prophet ﷺ is a divine Sunnah.
- The enemies of the Prophet ﷺ were answered in a similar manner in which they attacked the Prophet ﷺ. This proves that the Prophet ﷺ is Allah's ﷻ most beloved
- The Quran describes the punishment of all sinners but the severest punishments have been reserved for the blasphemers of the Prophet ﷺ. About them the Quran states 'zaneem' or 'Abtar' or 'Tabat yadaa' and Lan Yagfarallaahu'
- Very honourable and very wealthy people are humiliated when they blaspheme the Prophet ﷺ so what will happen to others.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
العنكبوت

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<sup>41</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

<sup>42</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

<sup>43</sup> Tafseer Mazhari

<sup>44</sup> Tafseer Ibn Katheer from Ibn Abi Haatim

<sup>45</sup> Tafseer Ibn Katheer from Bazaar

<sup>46</sup> Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan