Post world war divisions. But before this Syria is one large region. So from a historical and ancient point of view, the Arab world can be divided into three parts (specifically the Arab world, we are not talking about Europe and Africa now, just the Arab world). It can be divided into Iraq and its peripheral regions, and then there is Sham (and we talked about what Sham and Syria what that represents) and then there is a separate sort of cut off peninsula and that is Al-Jazeera. Nowadays we call it Gulf. But when we use Gulf nowadays, we are referring to some Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and some of these regions but the Gulf of the old times, Al-Jazeera of the old times is a much wider geographical region, almost a triangle which meets seas on three sides, not four sides but on three sides. And it includes Yemen. Nonetheless, Yemen is kind of cut off. It’s there but it’s not too connected. It’s a little bit to the side and that becomes important historically as we will see also.

So now, for a great period in history, Yemen controlled, and the rule of Saba controlled the trade between Europe and the rest of the world and between Asia and the rest of the world. This was the avenue by which they would have to go. Their ports were of strategic importance. So this was what gave them their economic strength and also their political importance because when you are important strategically, economically then your political power also rises. So this was one of the main means by which they had their importance.

Now the great flood occurs once again around the year 450 and 451 and what happens to them as a civilization? It’s collapse. That economy is gone and the ports are destroyed. Now pretty much everything they had going for themselves is finished. So that route that used to be for trade is no longer. Now there are other means by which this travel needs to take place.

 Now this is a little bit of background on the Yemen side. How is this connected to Arabia? A lot of Arabs, Yemenis are Arabs also, they left that region and they started travelling to other parts of the Arab world and they started settling as tribes in different places. Yemenis have been travelling for a long time. Some narrations even say that the first tribe that came with Ismail Alaihis Salam way before this (you know when they saw the water), that was also a Yemeni tribe originally. So they have been travelling and leaving Yemen for other travels within the Arab world for a long time already but this was a major exodus because of the economic downfall in that region. By the way Ous and Khazraj also historically happen to be tribes that left yemen for economic reasons and settled in Medina. So their history is traced back to that original exodus.

In the meantime, in the rest Arabia especially in the land of Hijaz the children of Ibrahim Alaihis Salam through the lineage of Ismail Alahis salam are settling in different places. They are not all in Makkah. He made dua for them in Makkah, this is true, but they were dispersed all over Arabia. They were not in one place. This is around the same time as this collapse took place. There is a historical figure we learn about in books of history. Ibn e Khuldum mentions him in detail. His name was Uthay Ibn ul Kalam and he was a leader among the Arabs who was from the family of Ismail Alahis Salam. And he makes a call to the children of Ismail, the Arabs, to unify and to move to Makkah to make it a central city from which they can establish some makings of a state. Now the Arab concept of State is not the same as the Roman concept of State or the Persian concept of State or even what we consider state in our terms but they’re saying Arabs are Bedouins, they are dispersed, lets unify our family forces, settle them together in one place and become one block strength and form something like a state. So this was the call that he made and he was a very charismatic leader so he was able to do this very very quickly. He btw is born in the year 400. So he’s born about 50 years before the great flood happens in another part of the world which is in yemen. He historically is called Al Mujammé, that’s the title he was given historically. Why? Mujammé means one who caused gathering. He made gathering happen. He allowed for all the Arabs that were dispersed, the children of Ismail Alahis Salam to commune and gather in Makkah.

Makkah already had a population but it was very small but now it starts becoming more centralized and starts getting populated. Now this man, Uthai has three sons and one of the most famous of his sons, his name is Abd Munaf. And after he dies Abd Munaf starts taking a role of leadership in Makkah. Abd Munaf has, again his son, has four of his sons, so now we are talking about the grandsons of the great gatherer. And who are his grandsons? Their names are Hashim, Muttalib, Abd us Shams and Naufil. These are the four sons. Hashim is born in the year 464 which is after the flood. So this is almost a little over a decade after, there’s a vacuum, there’s an economic vacuum that takes place and Hashim is born.

As Hashim grows up, he feels that there is an economic vacuum and the Makkans may be in a position to take advantage of that vacuum and call attention of these other neighbouring empires to start making trade agreements with Makkah. And he sees this as an opportunity because there is no competitor. The competitor would have been Yemen and they are basically collapsed. They don’t have that position anymore and a lot of very powerful traders from Yemen have already left the region coz they couldn’t survive there any more economically. So he goes himself to Sham and speaks to the ruler Wassan he’s called and he sends his brother Abd us Shams to Habasha, he sends Naufil to Iraq and even he sent one of his brothers to yemen so in other words every neighbouring empire he’s going and he’s trying to make trade agreements with them so now they look at Makkah as a port to do trade.

The selling point for Makkah is that the Arabs generally had respect for Makkah. Idolatress they may be, they actually had accepted Makkah as the house built by Allah. Even though they are doing shirk, they still had it in their tradition, their lineage that this is the house of Allah. So in the culture of that land, in Hijaz and even further down in the plains this was already understood as a religious capital. So they said, this is already a religious capital, why don’t we try and make this an economic capital and use that strategically to our advantage.

Now when these four brothers made these agreements, you know the word for agreement (this is important now) the word for agreement is “Eeläaf”, and these four brothers who went and made agreements they are called “Äshaab al Eelaaf”, the people of those agreements, the trade agreements. Why is that word important? What does it remind you of? “Li Eelaafi Quraish”. So there is a historical connection between the term used for them and what we are going to be learning in Sura e Quraish. Another name for them is also Äl muttajrim” which means “the traders”.

Now Hashim, Hashim was one of those four brothers, Hashim has a son named Abdul Muttalib, born approximately 457 according to most historians. Abdul Muttalib has a son named Abdullah. Abdullah has Rasul Allah SAW. So now we have this timeline and connected to Hashim being one of the key figures who was involved in the revival of Makkah as an economic power and bringing it to fruition.

In the meantime, now we’re gonna look at another place. So we looked at some history of Yemen, we were looked at some history of what is happening in Hijaz itself, now we are going to look at what is happening in the Christian world, in the Roman world. In the year 300 after Eesa Alaihis Salam , in the Christian calendar, the Roman empire accepts as an official state religion, Christianity. Christianity becomes the official state religion. But the Roman empire isn’t limited to Rome. They include parts of western Asia that we call Turkey nowadays, parts of Egypt, they include underneath them Sudan and even Ethiopia and those are also Christian regions at this time. And actually a good part of Habasha was Christian and a part of Yemen was also Christian originally. In a brief era in between the Yemenis had a rebellion and they became a Jewish empire. And when they became a Jewish empire for a brief period, this is the time when they started oppressing Christians. And since they are very close to Habasha. I told you the Yemenis are kind of disconnected from the Arabs but on the map they are close to Ethiopia, to Habasha. And Habasha is what religion? They are Christian. They became briefly Jewish and when they did their ruler started to oppress the Christians. Some argue that this may even include “ashaab ul ukhdud” , those among the Christians who are muahidoon and what not. Some argue that that happened in that region of Yemen.

But when the Abyssinains see, when the Habashis see and the Ethiopian even see that the Christians are being oppressed, they move in to Yemen and they actually invade it and they actually set up a king from among the Christian Yemeni community and then Yemen becomes a Christian region once again. Over time though, very quickly, within Yemen there is infighting and political problems. Who are they connected to politically now Yemen? They are connected to Habasha but they are not really a colony of Habasha. They are left alone. They brought Christian rule abck and they left. So Yemenis are ruling themselves. They are autonomous but what happens is, there is a military coup. Abraha used to be a general and he fights against his own king, takeshim over and becomes the new king. And he keeps ties. Habasha would be alarmed so he tells Habasha “no no no, im not against you. I just wanted to have this region under my control. I didn’t think the previous administration was running things right but I wanna keep ties and allegiance with you”. It became weaker than before but the ties remain. Now this is important. The Christian allegiance , we’re gonna come back to it.

Now Yemen, the rulers, one of the ways they retain their power, one of the things that makes them build the people’s allegiance to them is they remind people of what a great nation they are and how they need to return back to their greatness. SO what is Abraha reminded of? He is reminded of the days when Yemen used to be the centre of trade before the flood. But after the flood, who took advantage of the vacuum? The Quraish did and all the trade moved through Quraish. So now Abraha decides he is going to build whats called a Qulais. This is a huge shrine which he wanted to make as an alternative. It was a Christian place of worship but he wanted to make it as an alternative centre and it is said that he used the most expensive equipment and building materials and exotic items and built this huge monument, a building, really a shrine and temple. His hope was that he would undermine the value of Makkah. It’s a much more elaborate, glorious place to come.

Now he thought because it’s more interesting, that people would come but people didn’t go to Makkah because they found it a tourist attraction. What was the attraction in Makkah? It was religious. And you can’t change people’s religious sentiments overnight so he gets really upset that he’s exhausted all these resources into building this huge thing and it’s not getting any traffic. No trade has changed. So he writes a letter to the king of Habasha and he says until the Kaaba is destroyed, we’re not going to have any attention in our region, in Yemen so you need to help us. When he writes this letter, the Arabs get word of it. The Arabs hear about it. And when they hear about it, what do they do? They are very upset that this conversation is even taking place so some of the Arabs that were a little crazier than others, there are several narrations. One of them is they burnt the place down. They went to Yemen and they burnt the Qulais down but another more popular narration is that they went there and they secretly entered it and they basically defecated in it and they violated the place and they left. This was their statement that this is what we think of your Kaaba so to speak. And Abraha sees this and this is an insult to injury and he was already thinking of attacking and now he has all the more reason. Now he can actually…. think about it from a political science point of view. If they have attacked you they have insulted you, is it easier to gather the troops and rally the people in your favour? Yes. so he sees this as an opportunity to rally everybody and go after the Kaaba. But historically we learnt that he was already interested in destroying the Kaaba, it’s very important to note.

 A lot of times when we study this history without studying it carefully, we think that his motivations were religious. But we have to understand the world works in strange ways. Maybe he has some religious aspirations in there but when you look what seems to be the case? His aspirations are political and economic. He wants his nation to be the centre of trade once again and he sees Quraish now as his formidable competitor. Also he realizes, we have a huge army and we are backed by the Ethiopians. Who’s backing the Makkans? Nobody. So we could do this without a problem. This would not be an issue. He gathers his troops now there are several narrations as to how many. The least number that we have is 12,000 and the biggest number in history books is 60,000. So we’ll say between 12 and 60k troops are now summoned and they are heading out. And with them are between 9-13 elephants.

There was one elephant that was famous among them. His name was Mehmood. They say he was a colossal elephant and he was sort of leading the pack. So they make their way out and as they make progress, they head towards Ta’if . now Ta’if people they don’t fight them. They say we’re ready to negotiate with you. Now it’s important to note why would Ta’if want to negotiate with them , The rest of the Arabs would not want to negotiate with them because their false gods, their idols, where are they stationed? They are in Makkah. You know why nobody would attack Quraish? Because Quraish is holding all their idols. If you attack them they are going to go back home and do what to your idol? They are gonna break it. But Ta’if used to worship the false god Lat and they kep the idol in Ta’if. They didn’t have the idol at the haram, they had it in Ta’if so they didn’t care if it gets destroyed. It isn’t t a big deal to them. So they start making a deal. They cut a deal to say actually we have no beef with you actually we’ll help you. The tribe of taqi specifically, they said we’ll help you. They appointed a guy, a navigator named Abu Righal and his job was, coz the way from Taíf to Makkah is complicated, “ I will guide your troops all the way to Makkah without a problem” . so they even get a snitch to go from Taíf to go and destroy Makkah and Arab was going to help them kill other Arabs. Abu Righal happened to die on the way. He was buried on the way and this became a monument. The Arabs would go there and spit and curse and throw pebbles at his grave and stuff coz he was a historical sell-out and he sold the location of Makkah and directions to Makkah to the army of Abraha.

Abraha gets to the region in the month of Moharram btw. This backdrop is very important. Why? Because when we study this sura and Allah izzawajal tells us “Alam tara kaifa (which is our job next week IA is to study the words of the surah. Today our focus was just history and why this history is important.) history is important first of all to know the reason why Makkah was attacked. There’s political sentiments in there. There’s economic sentiments in there. This is important to know .

If you look at Surat Al- Feel, Allah izzawajal talks about the political and the military safety of Makkah and when you look at Surat Al-Quraish Allah SWT talks about the economic safety of Makkah. These two different aspects of the security of Makkah are going to be dealt with in these surats. Today IA im gonna be very brief and just talk about a sprinkling aspects of this Surah but really our focus will be IA next week on the word by word analysis of the Surah.

Number 1 is the issue of “Alam Tara”. “Did you not see” is how it’s translated. This is a figure of speech in Arabic. First of all, it’s in the singular. IN English, it’s kinda hard to spot because had it said “Alam Taraoo” or “Alam Tara” the English would still read “Did you not see” because for English the word you is for both singular and plural. It doesn’t make a difference. But in Arabic when you say Alam Tara you’re talking to one and Alam taraoo when you’re talking to a lot. So that’s the difference.

Now this is singular. This caused a debate among the mufassiroon whether it’s talking to the Messenger SAW or is it talking to each and every individual who is being asked to reflect. There are evidences for both. For example “ Wa qada Rabbuka Alla tabudu Illa iyahu wabilwalidain I ihsana”. “Your master declared that you should worship none except He and you should be the best to both parents”. Now that “you” in that ayah is singular. But the Messenger SAW doesn’t have both parents. So who’s the ayah talking to even though it’s singular. It’s talking to human beings, the rest of us. So there’s precedents for the “you” singular being used for the messenger SAW and also for other than the messanger SAW. But the rhetorical function of the singular is that because it is not an ancient even, It is a very recent event, perhaps a lot of the people who saw this happen in front of them, they were eye witnesses to this, they are being asked to remember it one at a time. Each and every individual in the town can testify to what happened. “Alam tara” so that’s one way of looking at it. Another is that the messenger SAW is being asked “Alam tara” which makes it a little more difficult to interpret because if you say to the Messenger SAW “Did you not see how your Master dealt with the people of the elephant” well, there’s only one problem, he didn’t cause he was born after. Then you understand Alam tara in a figurative sense. In other words, did you not reflect upon, did you not realize, have you not heard enough times, have you not heard full depictions of how Allah protected the city as you were growing up even. In other words, the Quraish were so amazed at this event and what happened really is very very amazing that you can imagine that they talked about this all the time. So much so, that actually the Arabs didn’t have a calendar like the Christians have a calendar revolving around the alleged death of Christ. The Arabs didn’t have a calendar and guess what their calendar became? “aam il feel” . So and so happened ten years before “aam il feel” such an such happened ten years after aam il feel. Their point of reference became this. This is something that was talked about all the time and given the vivid nature of the language people could even imagine what had happened. So that’s one way of looking at “ Alam tara” . But then there’s the word “Kaifa” . and the word kaifa is very important because it alludes to the “yufeed ut tajeeb” How can Allah do that? How did your Master deal with them? If you look at the army and the size of it, the size of the army is greater than the population of Makkah. It is greater than the civilian population, what to speak of the military population. It is such an impossible scenario that this situation would be resolved peacefully without the loss of civilian life. It’s impossible in history to imagine an event where such a massive army would come against a town which doesn’t even have a population of soldiers to defend themselves. And even if they did they’ve never seen an elephant which is the ancient tank. It is the tank of back in the day. They had a dozen elephants which is more than enough to destroy an entire town where they don’t have brick architecture. Elephants can literally run the huts over. They could flatten the entire city. In such an impossible scenario, how can it be if not by the work of the Master, the Lord that the city’s peace would be retained? So the word “kaifa” in the ayah becomes really important. Didn’t you realize how this could happen if not for Allah? Did you not realize this could not be just some random accident? Did you not realize that someone is taking care of this city even in face of ashab il feel, the most vicious of armies, the most well prepared well equipped of armies? So that’s really the point at which I am going to conclude today IA as the reflection and some benefits of just the phrase “Alam tara” .