

criminals, advertising trade marks, meeting friends and relatives, investigating events and circumstances and so many other things. For this reason, it has been included in one of the necessities of life. In this, the apprehension of any idol-worship is far too remote to conceive. As such, this prohibition that was made to offset the danger of idol-worship should now be lifted.

Answer to this doubt is that First of all, it is not correct to say that, in our time, pictures are no more a source of idol-worship. Even today, there are so many sects and groups who worship their peers. Then, it is not necessary either that the wisdom behind an operative divine order should be found in every individual case. In addition to that, the sole reason for the prohibition of pictures is not that it is a conduit of idol-worship. In fact, there are Ṣaḥīḥ (sound and authentic) aḥādīth in which other reasons for this prohibition have also been given. For example, picture making is a duplication of the special attribute of Allah Ta'ālā. The name: *مصور* (musawwir: the giver of form, shape, color and real presence) is one of the most beautiful names of *Allah Subḥanahu wa Ta'ālā*, and making of pictures (and the giving of form, shape and presence) is, in reality, befitting for Him and it lies within His power to create among His creations thousands in terms of genus, race, class, category and kinds with millions and billions of living units in each kind, each different in shape. Take the example of human beings. The form and shape of men is different. So is the form and shape of women. There have been billions of individual men and women. None of them were absolutely like anyone else. The distinct features of every person are so manifest that an onlooker would easily recognize him without much hesitation. Who can claim to give the creatures such marvelous shapes other than Allah Almighty? A human being who makes a picture, or painting, or statue of someone living is claiming, for all practical purposes, that he or she too can make (the same) 'images.' Therefore, it appears in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari and in other aḥādīth that, on the Day of Judgment, those who make pictures will be told: When you have tried to imitate Us, make the imitation perfect too - if you have the power to do so. We did not simply make an image. We have invested it with a spirit too. If you claim to have 'created' it, then, you better put a spirit inside the thing you have 'made'.

Another reason why a picture is prohibited appears in Ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth

where it is said that the angels of Allah hate pictures and dogs. Angels do not enter the house that has these, because of which, the bliss and radiance of the house is gone, and the ability of the inmates to worship and remain obedient to Allah is reduced. Then, along with it, not so wrong is the well-known saying: خانه خالی را دیو می گیرد (A vacant house is occupied by demons). So, when some house remains unvisited by angels of mercy, who else but the devils and demons will be all over it staying there to sow scruples of sins first and then give the intention and the courage to fall into them.

Yet another reason appearing in some aḥādīth is that pictures are unnecessary embellishment of this world. Of course, in our time, pictures yield many benefits but thousands of crimes, including those that range between immodesty and pornography, also breed and flourish from these very pictures. In short, it is not simply one reason alone that was made basis for its prohibition, rather, there is a host of reasons why the Shari'ah of Islam has declared it prohibited to make and use pictures of the living. Now, if we were to suppose that there is some particular person in whom those causes are not found, then, from this stray incidence, the rule of the Shari'ah cannot change.

According to a narration from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd رضی اللہ عنہ appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم has been reported to have said:

أَشَدُّ النَّاسِ عَذَابًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ الْمُصَوِّرُونَ

Of people the most affected by punishment on the Day of Judgment shall be the makers of pictures.

And in some other narrations of Ḥadīth, the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم has been reported to have cursed the makers of pictures. Then, a narration from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضی اللہ عنہ appearing in the two Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhari and Muslim reports that the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم said:

كُلُّ مُصَوِّرٍ فِي النَّارِ

Every maker of pictures will be in the Jahannam.

This humble writer has put together detailed evidences concerning this issue from the narrations of Ḥadīth and the practice of the early forbears of Islam in his treatise entitled, *At-taswir li-aḥkam-it-taswir*.

Also included in it, there are answers to doubts entertained by people. If needed, please consult.

### A photograph is also a picture

Some people argue that a photo is outside the definition of taswir or picture, because it is a shadow, or reflection, as it would appear in mirror or water. So, they would argue, the way it is permissible to look at your self in a mirror, in the same way, a photo picture is also permissible. But this argument is absolutely wrong, because a reflection or shadow is a reflection until it has not been made to last through some device. Take the example of mirror or water. Your reflection in it will be gone once you move away from it. If the reflection of this figure were to be made lasting through the use of some chemical process or device, this very thing will become a picture, the forbiddance and prohibition of which stands proved from aḥādīth appearing in an uninterrupted succession. A detailed discussion relating to the issue of photographs has also been included in my treatise on pictures referred to earlier.

The next word: جَفَانٍ (*jifan*, translated in the text as 'basins') is the plural of: جَفْنَةٌ (*jafnah*) which means a large dish-like pan or tub to hold ample supply of water, and the word: أَلْجَوَابِ (*aljawāb*, translated above as 'tanks') in: كَالْجَوَابِ (*kaljawāb*) is the plural of: جَابِيَةٌ (*jabiyah*). A small water tank is called: جَابِيَةٌ (*jabiyah*). The sense is that they would make water-storing utensils so large as would hold water equal to that of a small tank. The first of the next two words: قُدُورٍ (*qudur*, translated above as 'cook-wares') is the plural of: قِدْرٍ (*qidr*) which is spelt with the Kasrah of the letter: القاف (*qaf*). It means a pot (to boil or cook. The last of the two words: رَاسِيَاتٍ (*rasiyat*, translated as 'fixed at their place') refers to their state as being set where they were. The sense is that they used to make these cauldrons so huge and heavy that they were virtually immovable - and it is also possible that they would have made these cauldrons fixed on the ovens of solid rock, and therefore they were immovable in that respect. Early Tafsīr authority, Daḥḥāk has given this very explanation of these words.

In verse 13: إِعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرِينَ (Do good, O family of Dāwūd, in thankfulness. And few from My slaves are thankful." [34:13]), after having stated that Sayyidnā Dāwūd and Sulaymān عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ were particularly blessed by Allah Ta'ālā, they and their family and children

have been ordered to remain grateful.

### The reality of Shukr (gratitude) and its injunctions

According to Al-Qurṭubī, the reality of *shukr* (gratitude) is that one admits that this blessing has been bestowed by such and such giver and then goes on to use it in consonance with the spirit of his pleasure and in obedience to him. Therefore, using the blessing bestowed by someone counter to his pleasure is ungratefulness and a virtual denial of that blessing. This tells us that the way gratefulness can be in words, it can also be expressed by acts. When expressed by acts, it would mean the use of that blessing in accordance with the pleasure of the giver and in obedience to him. Abu 'Abdur-Rahman As-Sulami has said that Ṣalah is gratitude, fasting is gratitude, and every good deed is gratitude. And Muḥammad Ibn Ka'b al-Qurazi says that gratitude is the name of piety and righteous conduct. (Ibn Kathīr)

In the verse under study, the noble Qur'ān could have used the comparatively brief expression *أَشْكُرُونِي* (ushkuruni: thank Me), but the words used are *إِعْمَلُوا شُكْرًا*. Perhaps this expression is adopted to release the hint that the gratitude expected from the House of Dāwūd was gratitude in practice. (The translation in the text has taken care of this hint by saying, 'Do good....')

This injunction was carried out so faithfully by Sayyidnā Dāwūd and Sulaymān عليه السلام and their families and children, both in word and deed, that no time passed in their homes when they did not have an individual member of the family standing exclusively devoted to worship. In fact, specific time was allotted to all family members for this purpose. As a result, the prayer mat of Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام would not remain unoccupied at any time by one or the other maker of prayer. (Ibn Kathīr)

According to Ḥadīth in al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said that the dearest prayer to Allah is that of Dāwūd عليه السلام. He would sleep half of the night, stand in worship for one third of it, and then, sleep during the last one sixth. And the dearest fasts to Allah are the fasts of Dāwūd عليه السلام, for he would fast on alternate days. (Ibn Kathīr)

It has been reported from Fuḍayl رحمه الله تعالى that following the revelation of this command of gratitude to Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام, he submitted before Allah Ta'ālā: 'O my Lord, how could I show my gratitude

to You fully and sufficiently while my gratitude too, be it oral or practical, is nothing but a blessing bestowed by You? On this too, a separate gratitude becomes due.' Allah Ta'ālā said, اَلْاَنَ شَكَرْتَنِيْ يٰدَاوُدُ (Now, O Dāwūd, you did thank Me ). The reason was that he had realized his inability to thank Him as was His due, and had made a confession to that effect.

Tirmidhī and Abu Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ report from Sayyidnā 'Ata' Ibn Yasār ؓ that when this verse: اِعْمَلُوا الْاَلْ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا (Do good, O family of Dāwūd , in thankfulness) was revealed, the Holy Prophet ﷺ came to the pulpit, recited this verse and then said, "There are three acts whoever accomplishes them would achieve the same excellence as was bestowed on the House of Dāwūd." The noble Ṣaḥabah asked: "Yā Rasūlallāh, what are those three acts?" He said, "Staying firm on justice in states of pleasure and displeasure both; and taking the path of moderation in states of prosperity and adversity both; and fearing Allah both in private and in public." (Qurṭubī, Aḥkam ul-Qur'ān, al-Jaṣṣāṣ)

In the last sentence of verse 13: وَفَلِيْلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِي السُّكُوْرُ, soon after having given the command for gratitude with special emphasis, the reality on ground was also pointed to by saying that 'And few from My slaves are thankful.' which is an admonition for a believer, and an incitement to observe gratitude.

The word: مِّنْسَا (minsā'ah, translated in the text as 'sceptre') in verse 14 beginning with: فَكَلَّمَا فَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ (So, when We decided (that) death (should come) upon him, - 14) appears in the sense of staff or pole (as of purpose or authority). Some early commentators have said that it is a word taken from the Ethiopian language and denotes staff. Others have said that it is an Arabic word from: نَسَاء (nasa') which means move back, drive away, postpone. Since a staff or stick is used to remove things undesirable or harmful, therefore, it was called: مِّنْسَاة : 'minsā'ah,' that is, the device to remove. By describing the circumstances of Sayyidnā Sulaymān's unusual death, the text has opened a gateway of many lessons and gems of guidance.

### The strange event of the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān ؓ

The elements of guidance embedded in this event are many. For example, Sayyidnā Sulaymān ؓ was a ruler having such an unmatched state at his command that ruled not simply over the world of

his time, but over the Jinns and birds and the wind as well. Yet, despite all these assets at his command, he too had no escape from death, and that it had to come only when the time was appointed for it to come. The construction of Baytul-Maqdis started by Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام and completed by Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had part of it still unfinished. This construction job was entrusted with the Jinns. They were contumacious by nature but kept working in fear of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. If they were to find out that he had died, they would have stopped working instantly and the structure would have been left incomplete. With the leave of Allah, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام made appropriate arrangements to offset this situation. So, when came the time of his death, he got ready for it and entered the *mihrab* (seat of authority in the palace) which was made of sparking transparent glass. His presence could be clearly seen from outside. As was his routine, he stood there in a stance of worship slightly supported by his scepter, so that, once his soul departs (when he dies), the body remains poised at its place with the support of his staff. The soul of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام was taken away at the appointed hour, but he kept firmly reclining on his staff and from the outside it appeared as if he was engrossed in worship. In that state, Jinns would not dare come close and peek at him. They kept working under the impression that Sayyidnā Sulaymān was alive. Thus passed a full year and when the remaining work on Baytul-Maqdis was complete, Allah Ta'ālā empowered the termite, (which is referred to by the Qur'ān as دابة الارض (*dābbatul-arḍ*: a creature of the earth), to occupy the staff of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. The termite ate out the wood and weakened the staff. When the staff was gone, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام fell down. That was the time when the Jinns came to know about his death.

Allah Ta'ālā has given the Jinns the capability of traversing very long distances within moments. They used to be aware of many circumstances and events not known by human beings. When they would communicate this information to human beings, they took it to be news from the unseen surmising that the Jinns too possess the knowledge of the unseen (ilm-ul-ghaib). Moreover, the possibility that the Jinns themselves had a claim of possessing the knowledge of the unseen cannot be ruled out. But, this unusual incidence of death unfolded the reality of all that. The Jinns themselves found out - and human beings too - that the Jinns are no

possessors of the knowledge of the unseen. Because, had that been the case and had they been aware of the workings of the unseen, they would have come to know about the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام more than a year ago, and would have been spared of the hard labor they went on doing on the assumption that he was alive. This is what has been stated in the last sentence of the verse:

فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنُّ أَنْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ

So, when he fell down, the Jinns came to know that if they had the knowledge of the Unseen, they would not have stayed (so long) in the humiliating punishment. (34:14).

Here, the expression: الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ (*al-'adhābil-muhīn*: humiliating punishment) refers to the hard labor they had to do in completing the edifice of Baytul-Maqdis under the orders of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. Part of this unusual event of the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام has been mentioned in this very verse of the Qur'ān while its details have been reported from several Tafsīr authorities, including Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه, and are there in Ibn Kathīr and all other Tafsīrs.

From this unusual event, we also learn the essential lesson that there is no escape from death for anyone and also that Allah Ta'ālā can, when He decides to have someone do something, arrange to have it done the way He wills. This is exactly as it happened during the course of this event when Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام was kept, despite his death, standing at his place and the Jinns were made to complete the work assigned to them. This event also shows that all causes and instruments of the whole world keep fulfilling their function until such time as Allah would let them do so. When He would not let them do so, causes and instruments fail, like the support of the staff here that was terminated through the termite. Moreover, soon after the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام, there existed the danger that people, who notice the astonishing performance of the Jinns and come across their apparently unbelievable access to things unseen, might take them as their objects of worship. This danger was also eliminated by this event of death. Everyone came to know that the Jinns were really unaware and helpless in this matter.

From this submission, it becomes clear that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had adopted this particular mode at the time of his death for two reasons: (1) That the remaining work on the construction of Baytul-Maqdis gets to be completed. (2) That people find out the truth about the Jinns, realize that they were really unaware and helpless, and thus there remains no danger of Jinns being taken by them as objects of veneration and worship. (Qurṭubī)

According to a narration of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Amr رضي الله عنه reported by Imām Nasa'ī with sound chains of authority, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "When Sulaymān عليه السلام accomplished the building of Baytul-Maqdis, he made some prayers that were answered. One of these was: O Allah, whoever enters this *masjid* with the sole intention of making Ṣalah (and having no other worldly motive), purify him before he goes out of this masjid, from all his sins (making him) as pure as he was when born from the womb of his mother."

And in the narration of Suddiyy, it also appears that soon after Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام was finished with the building of Baytul-Maqdis, he sacrificed twelve thousand cows and heifers and twenty thousand goats as a token of thanksgiving and declared the feast open to all. Celebrating the day as a day of rejoicing, he stood on the Sakhrah of Baytul-Maqdis praying: O Allah, it is You who bestowed this power, and all these resources, on me by virtue of which the edifice of Baytul-Maqdis reached its completion. Now, also give me the ability to thank you for this blessing; and give me death while adhering to the faith you chose for me; and once you have given me right guidance, let there come no crookedness or deviation in it." And he further supplicated, "O my Lord, for a person who enters this masjid, I ask you of five things:

- (1) Accept the repentance of a sinner who enters this masjid to confess and repent, and forgive his sins.
- (2) Guarantee peace for a person who enters this masjid to remain safe from fear and danger, and deliver him from all dangers.
- (3) Heal the sick person who enters this masjid.
- (4) Make the poor person who enters here need-free.
- (5) Let Your mercy be on the person who enters it as long as he



remains here - except a person who is busy doing something unjust or faithless. (Qurṭubī)

This Ḥadīth tells us that the work of building Baytul-Maqdis was already completed during the lifetime of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. But, the event mentioned above is really not contrary to the possibility that there remained some construction work left out even after the completion of the main building, as is usually done in the case of such huge projects. May be, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had devised the plan mentioned above for the completion of the remaining work.

It has also been reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام kept standing for a year supported by his staff, even after his death. (Qurṭubī) And according to some narrations, when the Jinns found out that a long time had passed since the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام while they had remained in the dark all along, they tried to determine the time of his death, and for that purpose, they went for an experiment. They released a termite on a piece of wood. Thus, from whatever of the wood was eaten by the termite in one day and night, they calculated that a year had passed over the staff of Sayyidnā Sulaymān in that state.

### Special Note

Citing historians, al-Baghawi has said that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام lived for fifty- three years and ruled for forty years. He had succeeded to the throne at the age of thirteen years and had started building Baytul-Maqdis in the fourth year of his reign. (Maḥzarī, Qurṭubī)

### Verses 15 - 19

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَيِّدِ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتٍ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ ؕ كُلُوا  
 مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ ؕ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبِّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٥﴾  
 فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ  
 ذَوَاتَىٰ أُكْلِ خَمْطٍ وَأَنْثَىٰ وَشَىٰءٍ مِّنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ ﴿١٦﴾ ذَٰلِكَ جَزَيْنَهُمْ  
 بِمَا كَفَرُوا ؕ وَهَلْ نُجْزِي إِلَّا الْكُفُورَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ

الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَرَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرَى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ سِيرُوا فِيهَا  
لِيَالِي أَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَعْدَ بَيْنِ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا  
أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ  
لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿١٩﴾

There was indeed a sign for (the community of) Saba' in their home-land: two gardens, on the right and on the left." Eat of the provision from your Lord, and be grateful to Him-- (You have) a good city, and a Most-Forgiving Lord." [15] Then they turned away. So We released over them the flood of the dam, and replaced their two gardens with two gardens having fruits of bitter taste, and tamarisk and some of the lot-trees. [16] Thus We punished them because of their ungratefulness. And We do not give (such a) punishment but to the ungrateful. [17] And We had made towns to be seen between them and between the towns in which We had placed Our blessings, and had measured the journey between them: "Travel along them at nights and days peacefully." [18] Then they said, "Our Lord, make (the phases of) our journeys more distant." And they wronged themselves, therefore We turned them into stories and tore them into pieces. Surely in this, there are signs for everyone who is ever-patient, fully grateful. [19]

### Commentary

In previous verses, warning was given to those who denied prophethood and the Day of Judgment and failed to realize that the power of Allah Ta'ālā was most perfect. Reference was then made to miracles shown at the hands of past prophets and mention was made of the events relating to Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام and Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. Now the text mentions the limitless blessings bestowed on the people of Saba' who were later punished because of their ungratefulness.

### The people of Saba' and the particular blessings of Allah upon them

Ibn Kathīr has said that Saba' is the title of the kings and citizens of Yemen. Tababi'ah (plural of *tubba'*) who ruled this country were these very people of Saba', and Queen Bilquīs who has been mentioned along

with Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام in Sūrah An-Naml was also from among these people. Allah Ta'ālā had opened the doors of His blessing on them providing their state with all conceivable comforts. Against these blessings they were asked to believe in one God and obey His commandments and thus be grateful for blessings bestowed on them. For a certain period of time, these people stayed straight with their mandate and kept enjoying ease and comforts. Then came the time when they became so engrossed in the good things of life they were blessed with that they started touching the limits of negligence, even denial. Then Allah Ta'ālā sent thirteen of His prophets to warn them. They did their best to admonish them and bring them round to the straight path. But, these people kept persisting with their attitude of negligence. Then came the consequence. A flood was sent over them, a punishment that devastated their once flourishing city of gardens. (Reported by Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq - Ibn Kathīr)

Imām Aḥmad reports from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه that someone asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ if Saba' mentioned in the Qur'ān was the name of a man, woman or some country. The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: This is the name of a man who had ten sons among his progeny. Out of these, six remained settled in Yemen and four migrated to Syria. The names of those who lived in Yemen were: Mudhhij, Kindah, Azd, Ash'ari, Anmar, Himyar (from the progeny of these six sons, there came to be six tribes known by those very names).

And the names of those who settled in Syria are: Lakhm, Judham, 'Amilah, Ghassan (tribes coming in their lines were known by the same names). This narration has also been reported by Ḥāfiẓ Imām Ibn 'Abd-ul-Barr in his book, al-Qasd wa al-Amam bi Ma'arifati Ansab-il-'Arab wa-l-'Ajam.

According to Ibn Kathīr's research with reference to scholars of genealogy, these ten sons were not directly from the loins of Saba', rather, they were born in the third or fourth generation of Saba'. After that, their tribes spread out in Syria and Yemen and got to be known by their very names. And the real name of Saba' was 'Abd-ush-Shams. His genealogical tree becomes established by the name Saba' 'Abd Shams son of Yashhab son of Ya'rub son of Qaḥṭan. Historians write that Saba' 'Abd Shams had, during this time, given the glad tidings of the coming of the Last Prophet, Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ. It is possible that he

came to know about it from early books of the Torah and Injīl, or from astrologers or soothsayers. He has also composed some lines of poetry in Arabic in which he has mentioned his coming and wished to have been during his time and been of some help to him. Then, he has also exhorted his people to believe in him and support him.

As for the statement of the Ḥadīth quoted above in which it is said that out of the ten sons of Saba', six settled in Yemen and four went towards Syria, this event relates to the time after the coming of the punishment of flood against them which means that these people had scattered towards different directions and cities at the time the flood came. (Ibn Kathīr) Quoting Qushairi, al-Qurṭubī has reported that the period of the people of Saba' is after Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام and before the coming of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and thus it falls in the period known as: فترته (fatrah or gap).

### **The 'flood of the dam' (sayl al-'arim) and the Dam of Ma'arib (the sadd of Ma'arib)**

The word: عَرِم ('arim) in: فَارْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ (So We sent to them the flood of the dam - 16) carries several recognized meanings in terms of Arabic lexical usage and the scholars of tafsir have explained this verse in terms of every such meaning. But, the meaning more in consonance with the context of the Qur'ān is the one that appears in the Arabic lexicons like Qāmūs, Ṣiḥaḥ of Jawhari and others, that is, 'arim' means a dam that is made to block water. Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه has also given the meaning of 'arim as dam. (Qurṭubī)

The episode regarding the 'flood of the dam' referred to in this verse, according to the statement of Ibn Kathīr, is that in the country of Yemen, three miles away from its capital, San'a', there was a city by the name of Ma'arib settled in which the people of Saba' used to live. The city was located in between two mountains. Water from rains used to come from the two mountains, leaving the city inundated. The city had the reputation of being a target of such deluges. Rulers of the city (of those, Queen Bilquis has been mentioned particularly) built a strong and fortified dam between these two mountains, a dam that would remain unaffected by the flow of water. This dam stopped the serial surges of flooded water that entered from the two mountains and turned the place into a great big storage of water. Even the water from rains falling on the

mountains started flowing in there. Provided inside this dam, there were three gates at appropriate levels , so that this storage of water could be released systematically for people of the city to irrigate their farms and gardens. To accomplish this objective, they would first open the topmost gate and use water as needed. When no water remained at that level, they would open the gate in the middle and after that came the turn of the third and last gate until came the time of rains next year, and the whole dam would stand filled to the brim all over again. Then, engineered and built under the dam, there was a huge big tank in which twelve outlets of water were provided to supply water to twelve canals serving different parts of the city with water flowing in all canals uniformly and was used to take care of various needs of the city. (Maḏharī)

The slopes of the two mountains to the right and left of the city were landscaped with rows of gardens fed by canals of water. These gardens stood adjacent to each other in two continuous rows by the slopes of the mountains. Though many in number, but the Qur'ān identified them as: *جَنَّاتٍ* (*jannatan*: Two gardens) because it has taken all the gardens in one row to be one due to their proximity, and then all the gardens on the other side as the other garden.

Trees and fruits of all sorts used to grow in these gardens so abundantly that, according to the statement of the leading early authority, Qatadah, and others, a woman would walk with an empty basket perched on her head, and it would automatically get filled with fruits falling off from the trees without the least need to make use of her hands. (Ibn Kathīr)

The second sentence of verse 15: *كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ، ط بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبُّ غَفُورٌ* (Eat of the provision from your Lord, and be grateful to Him-- (You have) a good city, and a Most-Forgiving Lord - 34:15) means that Allah Ta'ālā had ordered them through His prophets that they should make use of their extended means of livelihood provided by Allah Ta'ālā and continue to be grateful to Him through their good deeds and unflinching obedience to Divine injunctions, for He had made that city of theirs a really good city. It had a moderate climate without any extremes of heat or chill, so healthy, clean and bracing - to the extent that there was no trace of any hurting life forms like mosquitoes, flies, fleas, snakes and scorpions anywhere throughout the city. In fact, when travelers from outside would

reach the city - having lice or other harmful parasites in their clothes - these would die off naturally as soon as they arrived there (Ibn Kathīr)

At the end of the verse (15), by adding: *بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ* (a good city) along with *رَبِّ غَفُورٌ* (a Most Forgiving Lord), reference to divine blessings has been made all the more perfect by suggesting that 'this good life is not restricted to the life of the present world, in fact, should you remain consistent with your gratefulness, the promise of greater and more everlasting blessings of the Hereafter also holds good. The reason is simple. He is the creator and master-dispenser of all blessings and the one who sustains you - and should you, at one or the other time, inadvertently fail to be grateful or betray by negligence or shortcoming, Allāh Ta'ālā is a great forgiver too and will forgive your shortcomings.'

In verse 16, it was said: *فَاعْرَضُوا فَاَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرَمِ* (Then they turned away. So We released over them the flood of the dam). In other words, 'when the people of Saba' flouted the commandments of Allah through their contumacy and rebellion, despite having such blessings and despite having been warned by the noble prophets, We released a flood from the dam over them.' We already know that 'arim means a dam. This flood was attributed to 'arim for the reason that this very 'arim, a source of security and prosperity, was transformed by Allah Ta'ālā into a source of calamity for them. According to an account of the event given by Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه, Wahb Ibn Munnabih, Qatādah, Daḥḥak and other early Tafsīr authorities, when Allah Ta'ālā decided to undo the dam of Ma'rib (*'arim*) and punish and destroy these people through a flood, blind rats were set upon this great *dam*, who weakened its foundation and made it hollow. When came the time of rains and the flooding of water, the pressure of water broke through the already weakened foundation creating gaps and crevices in the dam. Ultimately, the water collected behind the dam ran over the entire valley in which this city of Ma'rib was located. Houses collapsed. Trees were uprooted. The water feeding the twin rows of gardens by the mountain slopes was dried up.

It appears in the report of Wahb Ibn Munabbih that it was already predicted in the books of these people that rats will destroy this *dam*. When people saw rats near the dam, they were alerted by the danger. As a defensive measure, a large number of cats were released under the dam in the hope that they would stop the rats from coming close to the dam.

But, when came the divine decree, the rats overcame the cats and entered into the foundation of the dam.

Then there are historical narratives that also say that as soon as some smart and far-sighted people saw the rats, they decided to leave the place and move to somewhere else. In fact, they made the necessary arrangements and got out of there one by one. Others stayed. But, once came the flood, they too shifted. However, there were many who were swallowed by the flood. In short, the whole city was destroyed. Some details about residents of the city who had migrated to towns in other countries have been given in the Ḥadīth of the Musnad of Aḥmad appearing earlier. Six of their tribes were scattered in Yemen, four in Syria and some of these very tribes came to be the forerunners of the larger population of Madīnah-at-Ṭaiyyibah. Related details appear in books of history.

What happened to the twin rows of gardens after the coming of flood and the destruction of the city? This has been stated in the second sentence of verse 16 as: *وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتَىٰ أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ* (and replaced their two gardens with two gardens having fruits of bitter taste, and Tamarisk and some of the lot-trees), that is, their trees that yielded fruit having good taste were replaced by trees that bore fruit having an evil taste. As for the word: *خَمْطٍ* (Khamt), most commentators take it to mean the arak (a pungent, thorny desert tree). The lexicographer, Jawhari says that there is a kind of arak which bears some fruit and which is eaten. But, the fruit that grew on this tree was bad in taste. And 'Abu 'Ubaidah رضي الله عنه said that every tree that is thorny and of bitter taste is called: *خَمْطٍ* (khamt). The next word: *أَثَلٍ* (athl) means a kind of tree that is also known in Arabic as : *طرفاء* (ṭurfa) according to the majority of commentators and both are generally equated with tamarisk in English. No fruit it bears is worth eating. Some commentators said that 'athl' in the sense of samr (Mimosa, Egyptian thorn) or babul or kikar, (Acacia Arabica found in the sub-continent) is a thorny tree the fruit of which is fed to goats.

The word: *سِدْرٍ* (sidr) means beri or ber in Urdu and is translated in English as the lote-fruit or lotus tree in English. Sidr is of two kinds. The one planted on farms bears fruits of pleasant taste (something close to crunchy pears) and carries more of fruits and less of thorns. The other

kind is wild and grows in the form of thorny shrubs and trees with more thorns and less fruits that are bitter as well. At this place, the use of the word: قلیل (*qalil*: little, some) along with (sidr: *bair* or *lote*) perhaps indicates that this too was wild which bears less fruit and is bitter. Allah knows best.

The next verse: ذَلِكْ جَزَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا (Thus We punished them because of their ungratefulness.- 34:17) means that they were punished because they committed kufr. Kufr has two meanings. It could mean ungratefulness and it could mean the denial of the true faith. At this place, both meanings can be applied because they did both. They were ungrateful and they rejected the thirteen prophets sent to them.

### Special Note

There are two things here that are likely to raise a question. It has been said earlier that Allah Ta'ālā had sent thirteen prophets to the people of Saba'. Then, it has also been stated above that the event relating to these people and the flood of 'arim or dam transpired during the interim period after Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام and before Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ called the period of fatrah or gap. During this period, according to the majority of Muslim scholars, simply no prophet was sent which is the reason why it is called the period of fatrah or gap. If so, the question is, how can the coming of these thirteen prophets be held as correct? An answer to this appears in Rūḥ ul-Ma'ānī. There it is said that from the event of the flood of the dam ('arim) being in the period of fatrah or gap, it does not become necessary that these prophets too came during that very period. It is possible that the coming of the prophets to these people dates back prior to the period of fatrah or gap while their contumacy and hostility to faith may have increased during the period of fatrah whereupon the punishment of the flood from the dam was sent upon them in the period of fatrah. Allah knows best.

The word: كَفُورٌ (*kafur*) in the second sentence of verse 17: وَهَلْ نُجْزِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ (And We do not give (such a) punishment but to the ungrateful - 34:17) is an emphatic form of: كَافِرٌ (*kafir*) which means one who is very ungrateful or is an absolute disbeliever. As such, the verse could be taken to mean: 'We do not punish anyone other than the one who is very ungrateful or is an absolute disbeliever.' This, quite obviously, is counter to all those verses of the Qur'an and sound aḥādīth which prove that



Muslim sinners will also receive the punishment of Jahannam (Hell) to the measure of their deed - even though, finally, once they have gone through their punishment, they will be taken out of the Jahannam because of their 'Imān or faith and admitted into Jannah (Paradise). To resolve this difficulty, it has been said that it does not signify punishment in some absolute sense, instead, it means a mass punishment as was sent over the people of Saba'. This one is particular to disbelievers. Such punishment does not befall Muslim sinners. (Rūḥ ul-Ma'ānī)

This finds support in the saying of a Ta'bai Ibn Khiyarah. He said, 'جَزَاءُ الْمُعْصِيَةِ الْوَهْنُ فِي الْعِبَادَةِ وَالصِّيقُ فِي الْمَعِيشَةِ وَالتَّعَسُّرُ فِي اللَّذَّةِ قَالَ لَا يَصَادِفُ لَذَّةٌ حَلَالًا إِلَّا جَاءَ مِنْ بِنْعَصِهِ أَيَّاهَا (The punishment of sin is that the sinning person becomes sluggish in acts of worship (*ibādah*) his economic conditions becomes straitened, and enjoyment (itself) becomes hard to bear...' Ibn Khiyarah explained the latter part of his statement by saying, 'When one is blessed with something *ḥalāl* he can enjoy, there comes one or the other reason which spoils this enjoyment'. (Ibn Kathīr) This tells us that the punishments given to Muslim sinners are of this nature. No open punishment hits them either from the heavens or from beneath the earth. That is particular to disbelievers.

And sage Ḥasan al-Baṣṣri said: 'صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ لَا يَعْاقِبُ بِمِثْلِ فِعْلِهِ إِلَّا الْكَفُورُ' ('Great is Allah and He said it right: The punishment of an evil deed exactly in proportion to it is not given to anyone but the *kafur*' - someone very ungrateful or absolutely disbelieving). (Ibn Kathīr) This is because a believer, who is no *kafur*, receives some concession with respect to his or her sins as well.

An interpretation of the sense of this verse appears in Rūḥ-ul-Ma'ānī with reference to Kashf. There it is said that the statement is made in its real sense. Punishment as punishment is given only to a disbeliever and whatever pain is caused to a believing sinner through things like fire is only an apparent punishment. In reality, the purpose is to cleanse him from sin. This is like heating up gold in a furnace. The purpose is to remove its unwanted sediments. This holds true in the case of a believer as well. If he too is put in Jahannam as a consequence of some sin of his, it will be to burn out those elements of his body that have grown on him from consuming what is haram. Once this is taken care of, he is ready to go to Jannah and it does not take much time that he is taken out of

Jahannam (Hell) and admitted into the Paradise (Jannah).

In verse 18, it was said: *وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَرَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرَى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا* (And We had made towns to be seen between them and between the towns in which We had placed Our blessings, and had measured the journey between them: "Travel along them at nights and days peacefully. - 18") This verse mentions yet another blessing Allah Ta'ālā had bestowed on the people of Saba'. Then it goes on to refer to the ungratefulness of those people who acted ignorantly and chose to ask for a reversal of this blessing by praying that the thing be made harder and more challenging for them. The statement: *الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَرَكْنَا فِيهَا* (towns in which We had placed Our blessings) in this verse probably means the rural areas of the country of Syria, because the reference to the descent of mercy in several verses of the Qur'an is specifically related to that country. The sense of the verse is that Allah Ta'ālā had made their travels to the towns of Syria very easy for them during their trips they had to undertake for their business. Given the conditions that prevailed in the world of that time, the travel distance between the city of Ma'arib and the country of Syria was fairly long with routes being uneven. In view of this difficulty, Allah Ta'ālā had blessed the people of Saba' by having made for their convenience a series of towns at intermittent distances all the way from the city of Ma'arib to the country of Syria.

These habitations were close by the main road, therefore, these were called: *قَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ* (had measured the journey between them). These habitations appearing one after the other were a source of convenience for weary travelers. If a traveler from one of them left home in the morning, he had the choice of reaching some other town on his way, stop there, have lunch or take rest as he wished and could leave after Zuhr and reach the next stage by sundown and spend the night there. The sentence: *سِيرُوا فِيهَا لَيَالِيَ وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ* (Travel along them at nights and days peacefully - 18) means that these habitations were made at distances that were balanced and equal so that they would reach from one to the other within a fixed time.

In the last sentence of verse 18: (Travel along them at nights and days peacefully.), mention has been made of a third blessing bestowed on the people of Saba'. It means that these settlements were located at such equal and balanced distances that a traveler would be able to cover them

in almost identical time. Then the routes were secure. Theft and highway robbery were unknown. One could travel at any time of the night or day without any hesitation or concern.

Verse 19 opens with the statement: فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَعُدَّ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ (Then they said, " Our Lord, make (the phases of) our journeys more distant." And they wronged themselves, therefore We turned them into stories and tore them into pieces - 34:19). It means that so unjust were these people that they would go to the extent of dismissing the very blessing of Allah placed there to eliminate the hardships of travel, rather went deeper into their lack of recognition and straight ungratefulness by coming forward to pray that their Lord makes the distances they cover in travel longer - hoping that the habitations do not appear at such close distances, and wishing to see some hard areas of a forest or wilderness which ask for some rough traversing as well. Their case was similar to that of the Bani Isra'il. They used to get the excellent sustenance of mann and salwa, all free of cost. Bored with it, they asked Allah to replace it with vegetables and greens. In return for their ungratefulness and lack of recognition for blessings, Allah Ta'ālā released the punishment on them that has been called the flood of the dam earlier. The ultimate consequence of this very punishment has been stated in this verse in strong words, that is, they were virtually expunged from this world leaving nothing but idle tales of their wealth and luxury.

The word: مَزَقْنَاهُمْ (*mazzaqnahum*) is a derivation from: تَمَزَّقَ (*tamziq*) which means to tear and scatter (a people) or to destroy (a kingdom). The sense is that some of the inhabitants of this city of Ma'arib were destroyed on the spot and some others were scattered in a manner that small groups of them spread out to various countries. This destruction and scattering away of the people of Saba' became proverbial in Arabia. On such occasions, there is an Arab idiom: تَفَرَّقُوا أَيَادَى سَبَا that is, these people got scattered away as were the luxury-laden people of the Saba'.

Ibn Kathīr and other commentators have reported a long narrative about a soothsayer who had come to know about the coming of the punishment of the flood a little before it actually did. He made a swift and unique plan. First of all, he sold his entire property. When he had the money in his hands, he told his people about the coming flood and exhorted them to get out of the area immediately. He also told them that

those who intend to shift to a safe far-away place should go to 'Amman, and those who have a taste for liquor, pita bread and fruits should move to Busra in the country of Syria, and those who would settle for rides that go through mud, come handy during the time of famine and prove efficient when dashing on a journey, should go to Yathrib (Madīnah) which abounds in dates. His people followed his advice. The tribe of Azd went towards 'Amman, the Ghassān to Busra in the country of Syria and the Aws and Khazraj and Banū 'Uthmān started off in the direction of Yathrib, the home of date palms. After reaching Batn Murr, Banū 'Uthman liked the place and settled right there. Because of this divergence, Banū 'Uthmān were given the title of Khuza'ah. Batn Murr is closer to Makkah al-Mukarramah where they had chosen to settle down. As for Aws and Khazraj, they reached Yathrib and stayed there. After the long narrative in Ibn Kathīr, the same detail about people scattering to different places has been reported on the authority of Sa'īd from Qatadah from al-Sha'bi. Thus, says Ibn Kathīr, these people of Saba' were shredded into pieces, people who have been mentioned in: مَرَفَّاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرَّقٍ (We torn them into pieces).

The concluding statement in verse 19: إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ (Surely in this, there are signs for everyone who is ever-patient, fully grateful - 34:19) means that there is a great sign and lesson in the rise and fall and in the radical change that hit the life cycle of the people of Saba' for a person who is enduring and grateful at its best, that is, when faced with some distress or pain, one observes patience over it, and when blessed with things of comfort, one is readily grateful for it. This is a life style in which one always comes out a winner. No matter what the state of his life is, he ends up in nothing but pluses, profits and gains. So says a Ḥadīth of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari and Muslim where the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have said:

'Certainly unique is the state of life a true believer is always in. No matter what Allah decrees for him, it turns for him into nothing but good and profitable. If he is blessed in one way or the other or has the desire of his heart fulfilled, he thanks Allah for it and it becomes good and beneficial for him in the Hereafter. And if he suffers from some pain or distress, he bears it with considered patience for which he is rewarded in a

big way and thus, this suffering too, becomes good and beneficial for him'  
- from Ibn Kathīr.

Some commentators have taken the word: صَبَّار (Ṣabbar: very patient) in the general sense of sabr or patience - which includes remaining firm in all acts requiring obedience as well as abstaining from sins. In the light of this tafsir or explanation, a true believer remains comprehensively attuned to Ṣabr (patience) and shukr (gratitude) under all conditions and then, for that matter, every sabr is shukr and every shukr is sabr. Allah knows best.

### Verses 20 - 21

وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ  
﴿٢٠﴾ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّن سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يُّؤْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ  
مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍ ۗ وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ ﴿٢١﴾

And Iblīs has found his assessment true about them. So they followed him, except a group of the believers. [20] And he did not have any power over them, but for the reason that We should know the one who believes in the Hereafter as distinct from the one who is in doubt about it. And your Lord is Watchful over every thing. And he did not have any power over them, but for the reason that We should know the one who believes in the Hereafter as distinct from the one who is in doubt about it. And your Lord is Watchful over every thing. [21]

### Verses 22 - 27

قُلِ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي  
السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شِرْكٍَ وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ  
مِّن ظَهِيرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾ وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ ۗ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا  
فُزِعَ عَن قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ۗ قَالُوا الْحَقَّ ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ  
الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٢٣﴾ قُلْ مَنْ يَّرْزُقُكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ قُلِ اللَّهُ ۗ

وَأَنَّا أَوْيَاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًىٰ أَوْفَىٰ ضَلَّالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾ قُلْ لَا تُسْأَلُونَ  
 عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ  
 يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾ قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ  
 أَحَقُّم بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا ۗ بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

Say." Call upon those whom you claim (to be your gods) beside Allah. They do not possess (any thing) even to the measure of a particle, neither in the heavens nor in the earth. They have no contribution at all in either of the two, and He (Allah) has no helper from among them. [22] And intercession before Him is of no benefit, but for the one whom He has permitted. (And those who will ask for intercession will remain fearful) Until when fear is removed from their hearts, they will say (to each other), "What did your Lord say?" They say, "the Truth". And He is the High, the Great. [23] Say, "Who gives you sustenance from the heavens and the earth?" Say, "Allah. And We or you are either on the right path or in open error." [24] Say, "You will not be asked about the sins we committed, and we will not be asked about what you do. [25] Say, " Our Lord will assemble us together, then will judge between us with truth. And He is the best Judge, the All-Knowing. [26] Say, "Show me the ones whom you have associated with Him as partners. Never! He is but Allah, the Mighty, the Wise." [27]

### Commentary

These verses are meant to prove the falsity of three different types of idol-worshippers. The first group among them, and the most absurd of all, was of the people who believed that these idols, made of stones are the partners of Allah and His associates in all His powers. The beginning part of the verse 22 refutes their presumption by saying, "They do not possess (any thing) even to the measure of a particle...". The second group of them used to believe that these idols are the helpers of Allah in managing affairs of the universe. The last part of Verse 22 deals with this group by saying, "And He (Allah) has no helper from among them." There was a third group of people who did not hold the idols as gods or helpers of god, but they maintained that these idols are so close to Allah that their

intercession is always approved by Him, and whoever has the advantage of their intercession, his desires may well be fulfilled. Verse 23 has refuted this belief by saying, "And intercession before Him is of no benefit, but for the one whom He has permitted." The sense is that their assumption that idols are close to Allah is not correct. They are neither close to Allah, nor do they have any power of intercession before Him. Then the text clarifies that even angels who are close to Allah cannot intercede for anyone without Allah's permission, and even if they are allowed to intercede, it is not easy for them to do that, because of Allah's awe they have in their hearts. The usual way in which they receive a command from Allah is that they become nervous, due to Allah's awe, when they receive it. Then once they return to their normal condition, they ask each other about the command to ensure its correct nature. This is the sense of the later part of Verse 23 where it is said, "Until when fear is removed from their hearts, they will say (to each other), "What did your Lord say?" They say, "the Truth". [1]

As for angels becoming nervous out of awe referred to in verse 22, its full description is given in a report from Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari. Says the relevant part of the long Ḥadīth report: When a command from Allah Ta'ālā issues forth through the heavens, all angels start flapping their wings in humility and emotional readiness to obey (as if dazed or benumbed of consciousness). When that effect of nervousness, awe and majesty recedes from their hearts, they say: 'What did your Lord say?' Others tell them that He has spoken the truth and that such and such command has come from Him.

And it appears in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim that Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه reports from some Ṣaḥābi that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, 'When our Rabb, may His name be exalted, gives a command, the angels holding the Divine Throne start reciting tasbih (saying glory) for Him. Hearing the tasbih done by them, angels of the next lower level of the heavens follow suit until this chain of glorification reaches the lowest level that is the firmament of the world (making it a simultaneously recited tasbih by angels from all heavens). Then, they ask the angels who are close to the Throne, 'What did your Lord say?' This they tell them. Then, in the same manner, those of the lower heavens ask those of the upper the same

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[1] This part is abridged from Khulasa-e-tafsīr. ('Uthmānī)

question until this chain of question and answer extends up to the firmament of the world' - excerpt from a long Ḥadīth. (Maḥzarī)

### Consideration of the psychology of the addressee in debates and avoidance of any approach that may provoke violent attitude

In verse 24: **وَأَنَا أَوْيَاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًىٰ أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ** (And We or you are either on the right path or in open error - 34:24), this address is beamed at polytheists and disbelievers. In their case, what was needed was already done. That Allah Ta'ālā was the creator, the master, and all-powerful in the absolute sense was proved decisively and explicitly. That idols and everything else other than Allah was weak and helpless was demonstrated clearly. After having done all this, the occasion demanded that Mushriks are told in clear terms that they were ignorant and astray in bypassing Allah and electing to worship idols and satans. But, the noble Qur'ān has opted for a wonderfully wise form of address, something that should serve as a guidance for all those who are engaged in the mission of da'wah and tabligh or in debates against opponents of Islam and votaries of the false. It will be noticed that the disbelieving adversaries addressed in this verse were not called kafirs, infidels, disbelievers or the ones gone astray. Rather, a change was introduced in the mode and content of the address. The arguments and proofs were already clear. In their presence, no sensible person could say that tauhid (Oneness of Allah or pure monotheism) and shirk (the attribution of partners in the pristine divinity of Allah) are equally true and that the adherents of both are following the truth. Instead of that, it is certain that one of these two is following the path of truth while the other is in error. Now, it is up to you. You think and you decide as to who is on the side of truth. Is it we or is it you? Had the addressee been called a disbeliever or someone who had gone off the track of truth, it could have made him angry. This approach was avoided. In its place, the approach was kept so affectionate and disarming that it would make even the most diehard adversary left with no choice but to consider what was being proposed (from Qurṭubī and Bayān-ul-Qur'ān)

This method of prophetic call, good counsel and good-mannered debate - in line with the command of the Qur'ān: **وَجَادِلْهُمْ بَالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ** (*wa jādilhum bil-latī hiya aḥsan*: (and argue with them in the best manners - 16:125) - is something 'Ulama' should keep in sight all the time. Once this



stands ignored, everything done in the fair name of da'wah, tabligh and debate becomes ineffective, rather harmful. As a result, adversaries turn adamant and cling to their error far more firmly.

### Verse 28

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ  
لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

**And We did not send you (O prophet,) but to the entire mankind, as a bearer of good news and as a warner, but most people do not know. [28]**

### Commentary

That Allah is One and that His power is absolute was the subject in previous verses. In the present verse, it is being said that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was sent as the Messenger of Allah to all peoples of the world who are there now or will come in the future.

The word: كَافَّةً (Kaaffah) in: كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ (Kaaffatal-lin-naas: for all peoples) is used in the sense of making something universal and inclusive of all without the exclusion of anyone from it. The grammatical arrangement of the text required saying: لِّلنَّاسِ (lin-naasi kaaffatan: for the people as a whole) because the word: كَافَّةً (kaaffah: all) is grammatically a hal (adverb) relatable to the word نَاسٍ (naas: people). But, in order to put a clear accent on the universality of the mission of the Last Rasūl of Allah, the word: كَافَّةً (Kaaffah: all) was set to come earlier.

The mission of a messenger or prophet assigned to all prophets sent before the Holy Prophet ﷺ was restricted to some particular people and particular geographical area. It is the peculiarity of the Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ that his prophetic mission is common and open to all peoples of the world. In fact, it is not simply for human beings, but is so for the Jinns as well. And then, it is not just for those who were present during his blessed time, but is universally applicable to all human generations to come right up to the last day of Qiyāmah. And this very fact of the continuity and survival of his mission as prophet and messenger demands that he has to be the Last and Final of the prophets and that no prophet is to come after his appearance. The reason is that

another prophet is sent when the law and teachings of the one before him are distorted or altered. Thus, a second prophet is sent to reform the people and reinstate them according to Allah's pleasure. As for the Shari'ah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and that of His own Book, the Qur'ān, right through the last day of Qiyāmah, the responsibility of its protection has already been undertaken by Allah Ta'ālā Himself. Therefore, it will hold on and survive till Qiyāmah in its original state and there would be no need for some other prophet to be sent.

According to a narration of Sayyidnā Jabir رضي الله عنه appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhari and Muslim and elsewhere, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been reported to have said: 'I have been given five things that have not been given to anyone else before me: (1) That Allah Ta'ālā helped me by placing in my person such an awe as it is felt by the people from the distance of a month of travel. (2) That the whole earth has been declared to be a masjid and a purifier for me (in the religious codes of past prophets, their worship used to be performed only in particular places set up as houses of worship. Worship was not allowed outside their appointed prayer places, either in the open or inside homes. For the Muslim community, Allah Ta'ālā made the whole earth a masjid in the sense that Ṣalah can be made everywhere - and in the absence of water not being available or its use being harmful, the dust of the earth was made tahir or purifier so that it could be used to make tayammum which becomes a valid alternate of wudu). (3) That property from the spoils has been made halal for me. Before me, it was not halal for any other community (among whom the rule was to assemble the war spoils collected from the disbelieving adversary and deposit it at an appointed place in the belief that some fire or lightning would descend from the heavens and burn it, and this act of burning would itself be the sign of the acceptance of their religious war. For the Muslim community, distributing the spoils in accordance with the rule enunciated by the Qur'ān and spending it as needed was made permissible). (4) That I was given the station of the Great Intercession (الشفاعة الكبرى : ash-Shafa'ah al-Kubrā) (that is, when no prophet would dare intercede on behalf of others on the fateful plains of the Resurrection [al-hashr], I shall, then, be given the opportunity to intercede). (5) That before me, every prophet was sent to his particular people - I have been sent as a prophet to all peoples of the world. (Ibn Kathīr)

## Verses 29 - 33

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾ قُلْ لَكُمْ مِيعَادُ  
يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَأْخِرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْتَقْدِمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ  
كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ط وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ  
الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْقُوفُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ ص يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ  
يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ  
﴿٣١﴾ قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا أَنَحْنُ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ  
الْهُدَى بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ بَلْ كُنْتُمْ مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ  
اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا بَلْ مَكْرُ الْيَلِيلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ  
نَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا ط وَأَسْرُوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ ط  
وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ط هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا  
يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

And they say, "When will this promise (of the Day of Judgment) be fulfilled, if you are truthful?" [29] Say, "You have the promise of a day from which you can neither be late for a while, nor can you be ahead of it. [30] And those who disbelieve say, "We will never believe in this Qur'an, nor in that which was before it." But if you could see when the wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord, repulsing words (of blame) to one another! Those who were held as weak will say to the overbearing, "Had you not been there, we would have been believers." [31] Those who were overbearing will say to those weak, "Was it we who stopped you from (accepting) guidance after it came to you? Rather, you were guilty. [32] And those weak will say to those overbearing, "But (it was your) intriguing day and night ( that stopped us from accepting guidance ), when you were directing us to disbelieve in Allah and to set up rivals to Him." And all of them will conceal (their) penitence when they will see the punishment.<sup>1</sup> And We

[1] They will conceal their penitence from each other, so that they may not face embarrassment before others.

will place iron-collars around the necks of those who disbelieved. They will not be recompensed except for what they used to do. [33]

### Verses 34 - 38

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ  
كُفْرُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَ أَوْلَادًا ۗ وَمَا نَحْنُ  
بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾ قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَكِنَّ  
أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي  
تُقَرَّبُكُمْ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَن آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ  
جَزَاءُ الضَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ آمِنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَالَّذِينَ  
يَسْعُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعْجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

And We did not send a warner to a township, but said those who lived a luxurious life therein, " We reject what you have been sent with." [34] And they said, " We are superior in riches and children, and we are not going to be punished". [35] Say, "In fact, my Lord extends provision to whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills),but most of the people do not know". [36] And neither your riches nor your children are the things that bring you near Us closely; however, the one who believes and acts righteously (is close to Us). Therefore, such people will have the double reward for what they did, and they will be at peace in the upper chambers (of Paradise). [37] As for those who strive against our signs trying to frustrate (them), they will be arraigned into the torment. [38]

### Commentary

**The age-old satanic illusion of taking worldly riches and honours as a proof of being loved by Allah**

All along the lanes of time since the very beginning, people intoxicated with material wealth and luxury have always opposed the voice of truth and taken a stance of hostility against the prophets and the pious people, except those whom Allah willed otherwise. On top of this,

they also used to argue in favor of their satisfaction with the existing stance against the people of truth by saying: Had Allah disliked our doings and ways, why would He give us wealth, recognition and power in this world? The noble Qur'an has answered it in several verses taking different approaches. The revelation of the cited verses is also related to an event of this nature which provides an answer to this absurd argument.

It appears in Ḥadīth that, during the period of Jāhiliyah, two persons ran a business in partnership. Then, one of them left the place and went to some coastal area. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ was ordained as prophet, and people in Arabia started talking about it, the former business partner then living in a coastal area wrote a letter to his former business partner in Makkah and asked him about his reaction and the reaction of other people against this person claiming to be a prophet. The former partner in Makkah wrote back telling him that no one from among the Quraish had followed him, except that a few people of no consequence, mostly poor and needy, were going for him. The man of the coast left his business behind, came to Makkah and asked his former partner there to tell him the address of the person who claimed to be a prophet. This coastal friend who used to study old scriptures, such as the Torah and the Evangile, presented himself before the Holy Prophet ﷺ and asked him: 'What is it to which you invite people to come?' He told him about the main elements of his da'wah of Islam. Immediately after having heard the da'wah (call) to Islam in his blessed words, he said: *أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ* (*Ashhadu annaka rasūlallāh*): (i.e. 'I bear witness that you are, without any doubt, the messenger of Allah'). He asked him: "How did you know this?" He submitted: '[As for your call being true, I understood it through my reason, and then the sign of it was that:] Adherents of all noble prophets who have come earlier have, in the beginning, always been the weak and the meek, the poor and needy, people who did not matter much among those they were sent to.' Revealed thereupon was the verse under study: *... وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا...* (And We did not send a warner to a township, but said those who lived a luxurious life therein," We reject what you have been sent with." - 34:34) (Ibn Kathīr and Maḥḥarī)

In this verse, the word: *مُتْرَفٌ* (*mutraf*, translated above as 'those who lived a luxurious life) has been derived from: *تَرَفٌ* (*taraf*) which carries the

sense of a life abounding in material assets, ease and comfort. Hence, *مُتْرَفِينَ* (*mutrafin*) denotes rich people of a community (who are arrogant and careless about what is right or wrong). The Holy Qur'an is saying in the verse cited above that whenever Allah has sent a messenger, these people intoxicated with their riches and pampered by a life of luxury have always confronted him with a flat denial of his mission.

Quoted in the next verse (35) is their saying: *نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ* which, in effect, means: "We are superior in riches and children, and we are not going to be punished - 35". (Obviously, by it, they meant: If we had been deserving of punishment in the sight of Allah Ta'ālā, why would He give us all this wealth and recognition)? The noble Qur'an gives an answer in the next two verses by saying: *... قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ...* ("In fact, my Lord extends provision to whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills), but most of the people do not know". 34:36] And neither your riches nor your children are the things that bring you near Us closely; however, the one who believes and acts righteously (is close to Us) *وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ* (34:37). The gist of the answer is that having more wealth and recognition in this world, or not having any, is no proof of someone being acceptable or unacceptable in the sight of Allah. In fact, it is in view of creational considerations that Allah Ta'ālā would give, at least in this world, property and wealth in abundance to whomever He wills, and gives less to whomever He wills. He alone knows the creational consideration behind it. But, taking the abundance of wealth and children to be a proof of being acceptable in the sight of Allah is sheer ignorance because, with Him, the criterion of acceptability, approval, support and pleasure is no other but 'Imān (faith) and good deed. One who does not carry these two assets - no matter how much wealth and how many children one has - these cannot make him or her acceptable in the sight of Allah.

This very subject has been taken up in several other verses of the noble Qur'an. In Sūrah al-Mu'minun, it was said:

أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ مَّالٍ وَبَنِينَ نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ بَلْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

Do they think that by consistently providing them with wealth and children, We are accelerating the (real) good things to them? The fact, however, is that they do not understand (the reality) - 23:55,56.

And the reality is that wealth and children that make man negligent of Allah become a curse for him. Then, in a verse of Surah At-Taubah, it was said:

فَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا  
وَتَرْهَقَ أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ

And their wealth and children should not attract you. Allah only wants to punish them with these in this world and that their souls depart while they are disbelievers - 9:85.

In that case, it will end up into the everlasting punishment of the Hereafter. As for punishing through wealth and children right here in this world, it means that they become so involved in and infatuated with wealth and property that they never find the time to think about their ultimate fate or turn towards Allah and 'Ākhirah - the end of which is punishment that will last for ever. Then there are many who have wealth and children both. It is within this world that, for the sake of wealth and children, rather, through the wealth and children, they have to suffer from thousands of distresses and pains. As such, their punishment starts taking effect right from this very world.

According to a narration of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: Allah Ta'ālā does not see you or your wealth. He sees your hearts and your deeds - reported by Aḥmad, Ibn Kathīr)

In the last sentence of verse 37: فَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الضَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ (Therefore, such people will have the double reward for what they did, and they will be at peace in the upper chambers (of Paradise).- 34:37), mentioned there is the state of the people of 'Imān (faith) and good deeds for they are the ones acceptable with Allah. Whether or not they are recognized in this world, their return in the Hereafter will be double or manifold. The word: ضِعْفٍ (*ḍi'f*) with a kasrah of the letter: ضَادٌ (*ḍād*) is a verbal noun which means 'like a thing' or 'the likes of a thing'. The sense is that the way wealthy people keep amassing their wealth in the worldly life, Allah Ta'ālā would increase the return for His accepted people in the Hereafter many times over. For example, the return for one deed would be ten of its likes, or ten times as much. Then, it is not so restricted either. Granted the person's sincerity in deed and in view of other causes and considerations, the return of one such deed can go up to seven hundred

times. That returns at this high scale would also be given as stands proved from Ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth. It is interesting that this too is not restricted. It could be more than that. In short, these people of faith and good deed shall be residing in the elevated chambers of Paradise in perfect peace and forever shielded against all sorrows.

The word: غُرْفَاتُ (*ghurufat*) is the plural form of: غُرْفَةٌ (*ghurfah*). It denotes a part of the mansion considered distinct and high as compared to other parts.

### Verse 39

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ ۖ وَمَا  
انْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ ۚ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

Say, "Surely, my Lord extends provision for whomsoever He wills out of His servants, and straitens (it) for him. And whatever thing you spend, He replaces it. And He is the best of the sustainers. [39]

### Commentary

This verse has appeared a little earlier (36) almost in the same words. As obvious, the same thing has been mentioned here, however, it has a difference. At this place, there is an addition of: مِنْ عِبَادِهِ (out of His servants) after: مَنْ يَشَاءُ (whomsoever He wills) and: لَهُ (lahu: for him or whomever) after: يَقْدِرُ (yaqdir: straitens). From the statement: مِنْ عِبَادِهِ (min 'ibadihi: from His servants), it is gathered that this rule of guidance has been put forth for His particular servants, that is, for the believers, and the purpose is to alert people of faith that they should not start loving wealth and comfort to the extent that their hearts choke when it comes to spending at occasions and on rights enjoined by Allah Ta'ālā. As for the earlier verse (36) that carries the same text, it was addressed to disbelievers and polytheists who prided on the worldly assets of wealth and children and declared these to be the proof of their success in the Hereafter. Thus, any discordance between the addressee and the purpose of address stands eliminated. Maulāna Ashraf 'Alī Thanāvi, in his *khulasah* of Tafsir Bayān ul-Qur'ān, has taken the same approach by first adding 'the believers' in parenthesis while explaining this verse.



Another difference between these two verses pointed to by some commentators is that mentioned in the first verse was the distribution of sustenance between different human beings, that is, Allah Ta'ālā gives more of wealth and property to some, and less to some others - all in His wisdom and in the light of universal considerations. And in this verse, only one person and his different states have been mentioned, that is, this one person has, at times, more with him, then, comes another time and the same person has much less as well. The word: 'لَهُ' (lahu: for him) which appears in this verse after: يَبْدُرُ (yaqdiru: straitens) releases an indication in this direction. This approach too leaves no discordance behind. Rather, the first verse turns out as relating to different individuals and the present verse, to different states of one single person.

The sentence: وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ (And whatever thing you spend, He replaces it. And He is the best of the sustainers.) in verse 39 literally means: 'For anything that you spend, Allah Ta'ālā gives you a return from His unseen treasures - at times, within this world and at times, in the Hereafter and at times, in both.' In things happening around us, we see that water comes down from above, animals and humans use it freely, needs of farms and forests are satiated, and no sooner does that supply of water gets used up, than another supply descends to replenish it. Similar is the case of wells dug for water that, no matter how much water is spent out of these, it stands replenished by nature from other sources of water beneath the bed. Man eats up his food leaving the impression that he has finished it, but Allah Ta'ālā provides him with other food in its absence. Physical exercise burns out calories of food and other workings of nature turn it into energy. In short, whatever man spends out in this world, it is the customary practice of Allah Ta'ālā that He would replace it with something else similar to it. Something happening contrary to this, as an exceptional case, - either to punish one, or for the sake of some other creational consideration - will not be deemed as contrary to this customary Divine practice.

According to a Ḥadīth of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه in Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "Everyday when people rise to see another morning, two angels descend from the heavens and pray: اَللّٰهُمَّ اَعْطِ مَنْفَعًا لِّخَلْفَايَ (O Allah, bless the one who spends [out of what You gave him or her] with its return, and let the one who withholds [what

You gave him or her] find it wasted." And according to another Ḥadīth, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "Allah Ta'ālā has told me: You spend on people, I shall spend on you."

### **There is no promise of a return for spending that is not in accordance with the Sharī'ah**

Says a Ḥadīth of Sayyidnā Jabir رضي الله عنه that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "Good deed is *sadaqah* (an act of charity in the way of Allah). When someone spends on himself or his children and family, that spending too falls under *sadaqah*. It brings *thawab* (reward from Allah). And one who spends to protect his integrity and honor, this too is *sadaqah*. And whoever spends whatever he does in obedience to the command of Allah, He has taken it upon Himself that He will give him its return - except that which is spent in (wasteful, extra to need) building or sinful activity, for there is no promise of a return for it."

After hearing this Ḥadīth from Sayyidnā Jabir رضي الله عنه, his disciple, Ibn al-Munkadir asked him: 'What is the meaning of spending to protect one's honor?' He said, 'There may be a person about whom one apprehends that, should he not give him something, he would go about maligning him in all sorts of ways. In this case, giving to such a person is in order to save one's honor.' (Reported by ad-Darqūṭni, Qurṭubī)

### **With the decrease in the use of something, its production also decreases**

The hint embedded in this verse also tells us that as long as the things of use provided by Allah Ta'ālā for consumption of human beings and animals keep being consumed, these keep being replaced by Him constantly. The rule seems to be that the more the consumption of something, the more its production. The multiple uses made of domestic animals like goats, sheep and cows put them high on the list of consumption. They are slaughtered. Their meat is eaten. Then, they are also slaughtered under Islamic legal requirements, such as, the *Qurbānī* or sacrifice, and in *Kaffarat* (plural of *kaffarah* or expiation) and *jinayat* (faults, offences against religious prohibitions). The more they are consumed, the more increased becomes their frequency of production from Allah Ta'ālā. This is common experience everywhere. The number of these animals, despite being under the knife all the time, remains the highest in the world. The number of dogs and cats is not that high,

although the reproduction of dogs and cats should obviously be much more as they produce four or five puppies and kittens in a single pregnancy. A cow or goat delivers two calves or kids at the most. Cows and goats keep being slaughtered all the time. Dogs and cats are (generally) not touched by anyone. But, as far as common observations goes, it cannot be denied that the number of cows, sheep and goats comparatively exceeds the number of dogs and cats. Since the time restrictions have been placed on the slaughter of cows in India, the production of cows has gone down there in that very ratio. Otherwise, every village and every home would have been full of cows that stayed spared from being slaughtered.

Once the Arabs tapered down their use of camels for riding and transport purposes, the usual increase in the populations of their camels has also gone down. Incidentally, what has been said here also helps remove that atheistic doubt usually dished out with reference to the Islamic injunctions of sacrifice saying that it is likely to affect the economy of Muslims adversely.

#### Verses 40 - 42

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا  
 يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ ؕ بَلْ كَانُوا  
 يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ ؕ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾ فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ  
 بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ نَفَعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا ۗ وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ  
 النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

And (remember) the Day when He will gather them all together, then will say to the angels, "Is it you that these people used to worship?" [40] They will say, "Pure are You! You are our mentor, not these. Rather, they used to worship the Jinns. Most of these believed in them." [41] So, you have no power today to benefit or harm one another, and We will say to the wrongdoers, "Taste the punishment of Fire that you used to belie."

## Verses 43 - 50

وَإِذَا تُلِيٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصَدَّكُمْ  
عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤَكُمْ ۚ وَقَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا أِفْكٌ مُّفْتَرَىٰ ۖ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ  
كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَمَا آتَيْنَهُمْ  
مِّنْ كِتَابٍ يَّدْرُسُونَهَا وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ قَبْلَكَ مِنْ نَّذِيرٍ ﴿٤٤﴾ وَكَذَّبَ  
الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۗ وَمَا بَلَغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رُسُلِي ۖ فَكَيْفَ  
كَانَ نَكِيرٍ ﴿٤٥﴾ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ  
مِثْنَىٰ وَفُرَادَىٰ ثُمَّ تَتَفَكَّرُوا ۗ مَا بَصَاحِبِكُمْ مِّنْ جِنَّةٍ ۗ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ  
لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٤٦﴾ قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِّنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ ۗ  
إِنْ أَجْرِي إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ ۗ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٤٧﴾ قُلْ إِنْ رَبِّي  
يَقْدِرُ بِالْحَقِّ ۚ عَلَامُ الْغُيُوبِ ﴿٤٨﴾ قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبَدِّئُ  
الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ ﴿٤٩﴾ قُلْ إِنْ ضَلَلْتُ فَإِنَّمَا أَضِلُّ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِي ۗ وَإِنْ  
اهْتَدَيْتُ فِيمَا يُوحِي إِلَيَّ رَبِّي ۗ إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

And when Our evident verses are recited to them, they say, "He is nothing but a man who wishes to divert you from what your fathers used to worship." And they say, "This is nothing but a forged lie." And the disbelievers say about the Truth, when it came to them, "This is nothing but an explicit magic." [43] And We did not give them any books that they might study, nor did We send to them any warner before you. [44] And those before them had rejected (the messengers), while these (infidels of Makkah) have not reached even one tenth of what We gave to those (before them). So, they rejected my Messengers. Then (imagine) how was My censure! [45]

Say, "I advise you for one thing only : that you stand up before Allah, in pairs and in singles, then reflect; (you will easily appreciate that) there is no madness in your fellow (the Holy Prophet). He is none but a warner to you in the face of a stern torment. [46] Say, "If I had ever

claimed any reward from you, then it is yours. My reward is with none but Allah. And He is witness over every thing." [47] Say, " My Lord sends forth the Truth. He is the Best-Knower of the Unseen." [48] Say, " Truth has come, and falsehood ( has vanished so as it ) has no power to produce or reproduce (anything)." [49] Say, " If I go astray, I shall go astray only to my own detriment. And if I follow the right path, it is because of what my Lord reveals to me. Surely He is All-Hearer, Ever-Near. [50]

### Commentary

The word: مِعْشَارًا (*mi'shar*) in verse 45: وَمَا بَلَّغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَهُمْ (while these (infidels of Makkah ) have not reached even one tenth of what We gave to those (before them).) has been taken to mean: عُشْرُ (*'ushr*: a tenth) by some early commentators. Some scholars have interpreted it as: عُشْرُ الْعُشْرِ (*'ushr-ul-'ushr*: a hundredth) while others call it: عُشْرُ الْعِشِيرِ (*'ushr-ul-'ashir*: a thousandth). Obviously, the later has a higher degree of exaggeration as compared to 'ushr or ten. The sense of the verse is that not even a tenth, rather a thousandth, of the worldly wealth, power, blessings of age and health given to earlier communities was received by the people of Makkah. Therefore, they should take lesson from what happened to past communities and the evil end they faced. These were people who invited upon themselves the wrath of Allah when they rejected prophets and messengers and, consequently, when came the actual punishment, their power, bravery, wealth and fortified fortresses could do nothing for them.

### Call to the disbelievers of Makkah

In verse 46: إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ (I advise you for one thing only), in order to negate any excuse for the people of Makkah, they have been shown a shortcut to ascertain truth. For this, they had to do just one thing: Stand for Allah, in pairs and singles. 'Standing for Allah' does not mean standing in the physical sense, something like standing up from the posture of sitting or lying. Instead of that, it means having the resolve to show full care and concern for the assignment in sight. Then, by adding: لِلَّهِ (*lil-lah*: For Allah) with the word: قِيَامًا (*qiyam*: To stand), the purpose is to make it clear that one should start looking for truth with a mind cleansed of previous thoughts and beliefs for the good pleasure of Allah alone, so that previous thoughts and deeds do not obstruct one's way to

an acceptance of the truth. And then, the expression 'in pairs and singles' is not intended to point out a particular number. The sense is that there are two ways of pondering over something: (1) To think it out alone and in private. (2) To consult friends and elders, discuss it with them and then arrive at some conclusion. It is being said here that, 'out of these two methods, you can go by the one you like.'

The conjunction: *ثُمَّ* (*thumma*: then) in the next sentence in verse 46: *ثُمَّ تَتَفَكَّرُوا* (*thumma tatafakkaru*: then ponder) refers back to: *أَنْ تَقُومُوا* (*an taqumu*: That you stand) appearing earlier in the same verse where the purpose of standing has been spelt out - that is, 'cleanse your mind of all previous thoughts, get ready to act for the good pleasure of Allah, think about the call of the prophet of Islam, Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ and decide for yourself whether or not it is true and it does not matter whether you do this thinking on your own and all alone, or you do it by consulting others and arriving at some conclusion following discussions with them.'

Onwards from here, another line of thinking has been suggested: Here is a solitary person, all by himself, with no power or group to back him and no wealth or property to strengthen him. Here he comes proclaiming an article of faith counter to that of his own people, rather that of the whole world, something having taken firm roots over centuries and something they all agree to. Such a proclamation can come only in two forms: (1) Either the person making the proclamation is totally insane who has no idea of his gain or loss and is ready to invite the wrath of his people and all sorts of hardship for him. (2) Or, what he is saying might as well be true - that he is a rasul or messenger from Allah and fears none in conveying and implementing His command.

Now, think hard with an open mind as to which of the two things is the real thing. If you think in that manner, you would be left with no choice but to become certain that he cannot be insane. The entire city of Makkah and everyone in the large tribe of Quraish is aware of his wisdom and character. He has spent forty years of his life among his people. From childhood to his youth, everything about him has been before them. No one has ever found any word or deed issuing forth from him to be counter to reason, wisdom, sobriety and gentleness. And other than the kalimah of: *لا اله الا الله* : *la ilaha il-lal-lah* (there is no god but

Allah) to which he invites people, no one can doubt any of his word and deed to be counter to reason and wisdom, even today. Given these conditions, it becomes quite obvious that he cannot be insane. This was established in the next sentence of the verse by saying: **مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِنْ جِنَّةٍ** (there is no madness in your fellow (the Holy Prophet)). Here, the word: **صَاحِبِكُمْ** (*saḥibikum*: your fellow) releases a hint in this direction. It is suggesting that should it be the case of a visitor coming in from outside whose antecedents are unknown and who is heard saying something counter to the belief of a whole people, then, it is possible to call him insane. But, this cannot be true in his case. He is one of you, he lives in your city, he belongs to your brotherhood and abides in your company be it day or night. Nothing he does is hidden from you. In fact, even you yourselves have never cast aspersions against him in that manner before this.

And when the absence of the first situation becomes clear, the second situation stands established that has been mentioned in the last sentence of this very verse (46) as: **إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ** (He is none but a warner to you in the face of a stern torment). It means that his presence among them signifies nothing but that he has been sent there to save people from the severe punishment of the Day of Judgment by warning them of it in advance.

Verse 48: **إِنَّ رَبِّي يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَّامِ الْغُيُوبِ** (Say, " My Lord sends forth the Truth. He is the Best-Knower of the Unseen." - 34:48) Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood (has vanished so as it ) has no power to produce or reproduce (anything)". It means that my Lord who is the Knower of the Unseen strikes out the false with a throw of the truth (as a result of which the false is destroyed, as it was said: **فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ** : 'and there it is all gone'- Al-Anbiya', 21:18). Literally, the word: **قَذَفَ** (*qadhfa*) means to hit by throwing. Here, the purpose is to highlight the truth as set against the false. Perhaps, there may be a wise consideration behind expressing this phenomenon through the word: **يَقْذِفُ** (*yaqdhifu*: He throws), may be the purpose is to point out to the after effect of the truth prevailing over the false. It appears here in the form of a simile as the throwing of something heavy over something feeble that shatters into pieces. So it happens in the confrontation between truth and falsehood when the later lies shattered. Therefore, it was said next: **وَمَا يُبْدِئُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ** (and falsehood

(has vanished so as it) has no power to produce or reproduce anything) that is, falsehood becomes so incapacitated in the face of truth that it can neither originate anything nor can it bring it back.

### Verses 51 - 54

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ فَزِعُوا فَلَا فَوْتَ وَأُخِذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴿٥١﴾ وَقَالُوا  
 آمَنَّا بِهِ ؎ وَأَنَّىٰ لَهُمُ التَّنَافُوسُ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾ وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ  
 مِنْ قَبْلُ ؎ وَيَقْدِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾ وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ  
 وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ مِّنْ قَبْلُ ؎ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي  
 شَكٍّ مُّرِيبٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

And if you could only see when they will be terrified! Then there will be no escape, and they will be seized from a place near at hand. [51] And they will say, " We believe in Him." And how can they achieve it (the faith) from a place (so) far off, [52] while they had rejected it before, and used to make conjectures from a place (so) far off ? [53] And a barrier will be placed between them and that which they desire, as it will be done with the people of their kind who were before (them). They were in a perplexing doubt. [54]

### Commentary

According to most commentators, the attending condition described in verse 51: وَأُخِذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ (and they will be seized from a place near at hand) refers to the Day of Resurrection (al-ḥashr) from the terror of which disbelievers and sinners will not be able to escape even if they try to do so. In our normal experience in this world, when a culprit runs away, he has to be searched for. Something like that will not happen in the present case. In fact, all of them will be seized from where they are located. No one will have the chance to escape. Others have taken this time to be that of the agony of death, that is, when the time of death comes, they will be terrified and, unable to extricate themselves from the hands of the angels, they will be seized where they are with their soul taken out.



The word: تَنَآوَشُ (tanawush) in verse 52: وَقَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ وَإِنَّا لَنَهُمُ التَّنَآوَشُ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ ۖ (And they will say, " We believe in Him." And how can they achieve it (the faith) from a place (so) far off?) means to pick up something by stretching one's hand. Then, it is obvious that one can pick up only what is near at hand. If it is very far, it will be out of reach. The subject of the verse is that disbelievers and deniers, once they see reality as it is on the Day of Judgement, will say, "We have now come to believe in the Qur'an, or the messenger of Allah to whom it was revealed." But, they would not know that the time and place for embracing 'Iman (faith) has receded far away from them for the reason that 'Iman is a thing of the life of the mortal world and that alone is what is accepted. The 'Ākhirah (the Hereafter) is not the venue of deeds, the place to act right (*darul-'amāl*). Nothing done there can be taken into account. Therefore, how is it possible that they pick up the great wealth of 'Iman just by stretching their hand for it.

The word: قَذَفَ (*qadhfa*) in verse 53: وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَيَقْذِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ ۖ (while they had rejected it before, and used to make conjectures from a place (so) far off) means to hit something by throwing. In the Arab idiom, anyone talking out of his hat having no proof for it is referred to by the expressions: رَجِمَ بِالْغَيْبِ (*rajm bil-ghayb*) and: قَذَفَ بِالْغَيْبِ (*qadhfa bil-ghayb*), that is, this person shoots arrows in the dark which has no aim or target. At this place, the expression: مِنْ مَّكَانٍ ۖ بَعِيدٍ (from a place far away) means 'what they say is far from their hearts, that is, they do not believe in it by heart.'

In the last verse (54), it was said: وَجِبَلٌ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ (And a barrier will be placed between them and that which they desire,) that is, they were not allowed to have it. This description could be true about the Day of Judgment in the sense that these people will be seeking salvation and Paradise but would fail to have it. Then, it could also apply to the time of death in the world, that is, they wished to have worldly wealth that was made to stay away from them by the barrier of death.

The word: أَشْيَاعَ (*ashya'*) in: كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ (as it will be done with the people of their kind who were before (them). They were in a perplexing doubt.) is the plural form of: شَيْعَهُ (*shi'ah*). One who is a follower of someone and thinks alike is called a shi'ah or partisan of that person. The sense is that the punishment of having been deprived of what they

wished to have was no other but a punishment that had already been given to people like them who indulged in doings their disbelief prompted them to do. The reason was that they were deep in doubt, that is, they did not believe in the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ nor did they have the certitude of and faith in the Qur'ān being the Divine word. And Allah is Pure and High and He knows the best.

**Alḥamdulillāh**  
**The Commentary on**  
**Sūrah Saba'**  
**Ends here**

## Sūrah Faṭīr (Creator/Originator)

Sūrah Faṭīr was revealed at Makkah and it has 45 verses and 5 sections

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

### Verses 1 - 3

الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا اُولٰٓئِ  
اَجْنِحَةً مَّثْنِیَ وَثُلٰثَ وَرُبْعًا ۗ یَزِیْدُ فِی الْخَلْقِ مَا یَشَآءُ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلٰی  
كُلِّ شَیْءٍ قَدِیْرٌ ﴿۱﴾ مَا یَفْتَحِ اللّٰهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكٍ لَهَا  
وَمَا یُمْسِكُهَا فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهَا مِنْۢ بَعْدِهَا ۗ وَهُوَ الْعَزِیْزُ الْحَكِیْمُ ﴿۲﴾ یَاۤاَیُّهَا  
النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوۤا نِعْمَتَ اللّٰهِ عَلَیْكُمْ ۗ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَیْرِ اللّٰهِ یَرْزُقُكُمْ  
مِّنَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ ۗ لَا اِلٰهَ اِلَّا هُوَ ۗ فَانۢنۡظُرُوۤا كٰیۤفَ تُوَفَّقُوۤنَ ﴿۳﴾

All praise belongs to Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who makes the angels messengers having wings, in twos, threes and fours. He adds to the creation what He wills. Indeed, Allah is powerful to do every thing. [1] Whatever blessing Allah opens for the people, there is none to hold it back, and whatever He holds back, there is none to release it thereafter. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. [2] O mankind, remember Allah's blessing upon you. Is there any creator other than Allah who gives you provision from the sky and the earth? There is no god, but He. So, to where are you being turned around (by your desires)? [3]

### Commentary

As for the statement: *جَاعِلِ الْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا* (who makes the angels messengers), it means that angels were assigned to convey the messages and injunctions of Allah Ta'ālā. From this, it is obvious that they are sent to the noble prophets عليهم السلام as the message-bearers or envoys of Allah. They convey the revelations and the injunctions of Allah to them. And it is also possible that the word: رسول (Rasūl) used here may be denoting the sense of link at this place, that is, they become a link between Allah Ta'ālā and His universal creation out of which the noble prophets عليهم السلام are the superior-most. Thus, they also become an intermediary link for the transmittal of revelation from Allah Ta'ālā to them. Then, these very angels happen to be the means of bringing the mercy of Allah or His punishment to the universal creation.

The next statement: *أُولٰٓئِىۤا أَجْنِحَةٍ مِّثْنٰى وَثُلٰثَ وَرُبٰعَ* (having wings, in twos and threes and fours) means that Allah Ta'ālā has given to the angels feathered wings they can fly with. The wise consideration behind it is obvious as they traverse the distance between the heavens and the earth repeatedly, and this can become possible only when they are endowed with the necessary speed to so traverse, something that can come about in the mode of flying only:

And the words: *مِثْنٰى وَثُلٰثَ وَرُبٰعَ* (in twos and threes and fours) are, evidently enough, numerical adjectives referring to: *أَجْنِحَةٍ* (wings) in the sense that the number of the feathers angels have varies from angel to angel. Some have only two wings. Others have three. Still others have four. Even the numbers mentioned here are not comprehensive, rather they are mentioned here just as an example, because it is proved by a Ḥadīth in Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim that Sayyidnā Jibra'īl عليه السلام, has six hundred feathers. (Qurtubī, Ibn Kathīr)

Moreover, it is also possible that these three words are numerical adjectives referring to the word: *رُسُلًا* (rusulan: bearers of the message) in the sense that these angels who deliver messages from Allah Ta'ālā to this world sometimes come in twos and at others in threes or fours. Once again, in this situation too, the number of four is not intended for restriction. It is there just for example because the coming of angels in a much larger number stands proved from the Qur'an itself. (Abū Ḥayyan in al-Baḥr ul-Muḥīṭ)

The next sentence: *يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ* (He adds to the creation what He wills) means that Allah Ta'ālā has the power to increase whatever He wills and as much as He wills in the creation of everything He has originated. This obviously is related to: *أَجْنِحَةٌ* (ajnihah: wings) in that the feathers and wings of the angels are not something simply restricted to two or four in numbers, for they could be many more than these if Allah Ta'ālā so wills. Most commentators say exactly this. And Tafsīr authorities Zuhri, Qatadah and others have said that this increase in creation is to be taken in its general sense which includes increase in the feathers and wings of angels as well as the increase of particular attributes in the creation of different human beings which, then, includes the beauty of form, the beauty of character, the beauty of voice and many more increased assets like these. Abū Ḥayyan has, in *al-Baḥr ul-Muḥīṭ*, followed this track of explanation and said that things like good manners, beauty of figure and face, perfection of reason and intellect, politeness in discourse and similar others are all included therein. This second Tafsīr proves that the beauty or perfection of anything one has is invariably a gift and blessing from Allah Ta'ālā for which one should be grateful to Him.

The word: *رَحْمَةٌ* (*rahmah*: mercy) appearing in verse 2: *مَا يَفْتَحِ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا* (Whatever blessing Allah opens for the people, there is none to hold it back,) is general at this place. It includes blessings of one's religion in this world along with those of the Hereafter, such as, faith, knowledge, rightly guided conduct as well as the mission of a prophet and the station of a Waliyy or man of Allah. And it also includes material blessings in the present world, such as, provisions, means, comfort, health, wealth, property, recognition and things like that. The meaning of the verse is quite obvious. It is being said here that the person for whom Allah Ta'ālā intends to open the doors of His mercy, there is no one who can stop it.

Similarly, the second sentence: *وَمَا يُمْسِكُ* (*wa ma yumsik*: there is none to hold it back) is general, meaning: what Allah Ta'ālā holds back cannot be released by anyone. This includes hardships and sorrows of the world. For example, when Allah intends to shield some servant of His from these, then, there is no one who can dare harass or harm him. And included here is the matter of mercy as well in the sense that, should Allah Ta'ālā

decide to deprive a person of His mercy due to some wise consideration of His, then, there is no one who can dare pass it on to him. (Abū Ḥayyan)

Related to this very subject of the verse, there is a Ḥadīth that reports that Sayyidnā Mu‘awiyah رضي الله عنه wrote to Sayyidnā Mughirah Ibn Shu‘abah رضي الله عنه, his governor at Kufah, asking him to send back to him in writing some Ḥadīth he had personally heard from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Sayyidnā Mughirah رضي الله عنه called Rawwad, his chief scribe, in his office and dictated his report as: 'I heard from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم soon after he finished his salah his recitation of the words: *لَا مَانِعَ لِمَا أُعْطِيَ وَلَا مُعْطَى لِمَا* اللَّهُمَّ لَا مَانِعَ لِمَا أُعْطِيَ وَلَا مُعْطَى لِمَا مَنَعْتَ وَلَا يَنْفَعُ ذَا الْجَدِّ مِنْكَ الْجَدُّ (O Allah, for that which You give, there is no one to stop, and for that which you hold back, there is no one to give it out, and no effort<sup>1</sup> by any maker of effort works against Your will'). (Ibn Kathīr from the Musnad of Aḥmad)

And according to a narration of Sayyidnā Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه in Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim, he said these words at the time he raised his head from the (bending) position of *ruku‘* before another sentence: *أَحَقُّ مَا قَالَ الْعَبْدُ وَكُنَّا نَكَ* (that is, these words, out of all that a servant of Allah can say, are the most true, incumbent and superior).

### Trust in Allah delivers from all hardships

The lesson taught by the cited verse (2) to all human beings is that one should not hope any benefit or fear any harm from anyone other than Allah, instead, one should keep his or her sight trained towards Allah alone. This is the master prescription for a better life in this world as well as in the life to come. This simple antidote delivers one from thousands of anxieties and sorrows. (Rūḥ-ul-Ma‘ānī)

Sayyidnā ‘Amir Ibn ‘Abd Qays رضي الله عنه said: Once I get to recite four verses of the noble Qur‘ān in the morning, I stop worrying about what would happen in the morning and what would happen in the evening. These verses are as follows. The first one is this very verse under study: *مَا يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ* مَا يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكُ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ (Whatever blessing Allah opens for the people, there is none to hold it back, and whatever He holds back, there is none to release it thereafter - 35:2). The second verse

[1] This translation is based on one way of reading this prayer, that is, jidd (with kasrah on the letter jim, but if it is read as jadd, the the correct translation would be: 'no high status of a person may benefit him against Your decree.

having the same sense appears in Sūrah al-An'am, 6:17: *إِنْ يَمْسَسْكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ، إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ* (And if Allah causes you some harm, no one is there to remove it except He Himself; and if He causes you some good, then He is powerful over everything - 6:17). The third verse is from Sūrah At-Ṭālaq, 65:7: *سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا* (Allah will soon bring ease after a difficulty). The fourth verse is from Sūrah Hūd, 11:6: *وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا* (And there is no creature on earth whose sustenance is not on Allah - 11:6). (Narrated by Ibn al-Mundhir, as in Ruḥ ul-Ma'ani)

And when Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه saw rain falling, he used to say: *مُطِرْنَا بِنِوَاءِ الْفَتْحِ* (The rain has come upon us through the rise of fath: (the opening) and would, then, recite the verse: *مَا يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ* (Whatever blessing Allah opens for the people, there is none to hold it back,- 34:2). This term of 'rise of fath' used by him was in rebuttal of the false notion prevailing among Arabs of those days who used to attribute the coming of rains to the rise of particular stars and said that the rains had come upon them through the rise of such and such star. Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه countered it by saying that (the mercy of) rains came to him through (the statement in) the verse of fath or opening. By this, he meant this very verse quoted above. He used to recite it particularly on such occasions. (Reported by Imām Mālik in al-Mu'waṭṭā)

### Verses 4 - 8

وَأَنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَتْ رَسُولٌ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ تُرْجِعُ الْأُمُورَ ﴿٤﴾  
يَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْعُرُورُ ۗ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا ۗ  
إِنَّمَا يَدْعُوا حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٥﴾  
لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ  
وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٦﴾  
أَفَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا ۗ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ  
يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ  
حَسْرَتٍ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٧﴾

And if they reject you,( it is not something new, because) many messengers have been rejected before you. And to Allah all matters are to be returned. [4] O mankind, Allah's promise is definitely true, therefore, the worldly life must not deceive you, nor should you be deceived about Allah by the big deceiver (Satan). [5] Surely Satan is an enemy for you. So, take him as an enemy. He invites his group only to cause them to be among the people of blazing fire. [6] Those who disbelieve will have a severe punishment; and those who believe and do righteous deeds will have forgiveness and a great reward. [7] Is it, then, that the one whose evil deed has been made attractive to him so much that he deems it to be good (will be held equal to him who differentiates between right and wrong) ? The fact, therefore, is that Allah lets go astray whomsoever He wills , and leads to the right path whomsoever He wills. So, let not your soul collapse in grief for them. Surely Allah fully knows what they are doing. [8]

### Commentary

The word: غَرُور (gharur) is an emphatic form of an adjective that means one who is very deceiving (hence, rendered here as 'big deceiver'). It refers to the Shaitan (Satan) whose sole job is to deceive people and throw them into disbelief and sin. And the expression: لَا يُغَيِّرَنَّكُمْ بِاللَّهِ الْعُرُورُ (5) means 'nor should you be deceived about Allah'. To explain this deception, it can be said that the Shaitan may not, by showing your evil deeds as good, cause you to become so involved with these that you reach the stage when you go on committing a sin and, at the same time, keep thinking that you are of those accepted in the sight of Allah, and that you will not have to undergo any punishment.' (Qurṭubī)

Imām al-Baghawī has reported on the authority of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه that the verse: فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ (The fact, therefore, is that Allah lets go astray whomsoever He wills , and leads to the right path whomsoever He wills.- 8) was revealed at a time when the Holy Prophet ﷺ had made the prayer: 'O Allah, bless Islam with prestige and power, through 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, or Abū Jahl.' Out of the two, Allah Ta'ālā showed the right path to Sayyidnā 'Umar and made him the cause of Islam's prestige and power, while Abū Jahl remained as astray as he was. (Maḥzarī)



## Verses 9 - 14

وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَسُقْنَهُ إِلَىٰ بَلَدٍ مَيِّتٍ فَأَحْيَيْنَا  
 بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۗ كَذَلِكَ النُّشُورُ ﴿٩﴾ مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ  
 فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًا ۗ إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ  
 يَرْفَعُهُ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ يَمْكُرُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ ۖ وَمَكْرُ  
 أُولَئِكَ هُوَ يُبْوَرُ ﴿١٠﴾ وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ  
 جَعَلَكُمْ أَرْوَاجًا ۗ وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنْثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ ۗ وَمَا  
 يُعْمَرُ مِنْ مُعَمَّرٍ وَلَا يُنْقِصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ ۗ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَىٰ  
 اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾ وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ ۚ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ  
 شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ ۗ وَمِنْ كُلِّ تَاكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا  
 وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حَلِيَّةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا ۗ وَتَرَىٰ الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَآخِرَ لِيَتَبَتَّغُوا  
 مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ يُوَلِّجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُوَلِّجُ  
 النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ ۗ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ ۗ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ  
 مُسَمًّى ۗ ذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مَا  
 يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْ قِطْمِيرٍ ﴿١٣﴾ إِنَّ تَدْعُوهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دَعَاءَكُمْ ۖ وَكَو  
 سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ ۗ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكْفُرُونَ بِشِرْكِكُمْ ۗ وَلَا  
 يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثْلُ خَبِيرٍ ﴿١٤﴾

And Allah is the One who sends the winds, then they raise up the clouds, then We drive them to a dead land and revive the land through them after its death. In similar way shall be the resurrection. [9] Whoever desires honor, then all honor lies with Allah alone. Towards Him ascends the pure word, and the righteous deed uplifts it. As for those who plot evils, for them there is a severe punishment, and their plot itself will perish. [10] And Allah has created you from dust, then

from a drop of semen, then He made you couples. And no female conceives nor gives birth without His knowledge. And no aged person is made to advance in age, nor a part is curtailed from his age, but all this is (recorded) in a book. Surely all this is easy for Allah. [11] And two seas are not alike; this one is sweet, saturating, pleasant to drink, and that one is saltish, bitter. And from each, you eat fresh meat, and derive ornaments that you wear. And you see the boats therein cleaving through water, so that you may search for His grace, and that you may be grateful. [12] He makes the night enter into the day and makes the day enter into the night, and He has subjugated the sun and the moon; each one of them is running towards an appointed time. That is Allah, your Lord. To Him belongs the kingdom. And those whom you invoke beside Him do not own even the membrane on a date-stone. [13] If you call them, they do not hear your call, and even if they were to hear, they would not respond to you. And on the Day of Judgment they will deny your having held them as Allah's partners. and none can inform you like Him who is Aware. [14]

### Commentary

In verse 10, it was said: **إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ** (Towards Him ascends the pure word, and the righteous deed uplifts it). Immediately earlier to this, it was declared that the person seeking honor and power should understand that these matters are not controlled by anyone other than Allah. As for those who have taken certain things as objects of worship or have taken some people as friends in the hope of being honored by them, they cannot give honor to anyone. Given in the present verse, there is a method of acquiring the gifts of grace and honor from Allah Ta'ālā. It has two parts: (1) Good word (that is, the kalimah of tauhid: la ilaha il-lal-lah) and the knowledge of the being and attributes of Allah. (2) Good deed, that is, to believe by heart and then act in accordance with its dictates under the Sharī'ah. Shah 'Abdul Qadir رحمه الله تعالى has said in Mudih-ul-Qur'an that this prescription of becoming a recipient of honor is perfectly true and tested, however, the condition is that one remains constant in remembering Allah and doing good deeds. When this constancy reaches an appointed limit, Allah Ta'ālā blesses the doer of these with an everlasting and unparalleled honor both in this world and in the world to come.

These two parts have been expressed in the cited verse by saying that good word ascends towards Allah and reaches Him while good deed uplifts it and makes it reach Him. In the grammatical arrangement of: *الْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ* (the good deed uplifts it) there are certain probabilities. The meanings of the sentence change in terms of each such probability. Authorities in Tafsīr have explained it in line with the respective probabilities that they have deemed to be appropriate by them. According to the first probability, the subjective pronoun in: *يَرْفَعُهُ* (uplifts) should be taken as reverting to: ... (the good deed) and the objective pronoun (it) to: ... (good word) meaning: 'good words ascend to Allah, but the thing through which they are made to ascend are good deeds (as in the khulasa-e-Tafsīr of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi). The majority of Tafsīr authorities - Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Jubayr, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujahid, Dahhak, Shahr Ibn Hawshab and others - have opted for this very approach. And the sense of ascending to and being helped to ascend is being accepted in the sight of Allah, therefore, the gist of the sentence would be that good word, be it the kalimah of tauhid or others words of the remembrance and glorification of Allah, nothing of it gets to be acceptable with Allah without good deed. Here, the confirmation by heart is an integral part of good deed the most important part of which is the belief by heart in His Oneness. This belief by heart is a necessary condition for the acceptance of deeds in the absolute sense. Without it, neither the Kalimah: *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ* (*la ilaha il-lal-lah*) nor any other Dhikr of Allah is acceptable.

Then, there are the other parts of good deed, such as, prayers and fasting and abstinence from forbidden and reprehensible things. Though, the acceptability of the 'good word', that is, the kalimah of tauhid does not depend on such good deeds, yet these deeds too are conditions to a perfect acceptability of the 'good words'. If a person simply does not have faith, and its confirmation, in his heart, then, no matter how many times he repeats the words of the cardinal statement of one's Islam (Kalimah Tauḥīd: *la ilaha il-lal-lah*) and remains engaged with dhikr and Tasbiḥ of Allah, he will not deserve the least of acceptability in the sight of Allah. In contrast, there is the case of the other person who does have faith and its confirmation, but fails to do other good deeds or falls short in them, then, his saying of the kalimah of tauhid and the doing of the dhikr of

Allah will, though, not go to waste totally, however, its benefit will be restricted to delivering him from the everlasting punishment. The consequence will be that he will go through a certain punishment for some time that will be in proportion to his abandonment of duty and the shortcoming.

In a Ḥadīth, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said, 'Allah Ta'ālā does not accept any word without deed, and any word and deed without the intention, and any word, deed and intention without compatibility with sunnah (as said and done by him).'

 (Qurṭubī)

This tells us that correspondence with sunnah is the condition of perfect acceptability. Even if the word, the deed and the intention, all these, are also correct but the mode and method of conduct is not in accordance with sunnah, then, one cannot become a recipient of perfect acceptability with Allah.

Some commentators suggest another syntactical arrangement in respect of this sentence. According to them, the subjective pronoun in: *يُرْفَعُهُ* (uplifts) reverts to: *ضمير فاعل* (good word) and the objective pronoun (i.e.'it') to: *كلم طيب* (good deed). Thus, the meaning of the sentence become totally different from that of the earlier, that is, 'good word' which is the dhikr of Allah, makes 'good deed' ascend and makes it rise higher up, that is, makes it worthy of being accepted. The outcome would then be that a person who does good deeds, and along with it, also does his dhikr of Allah abundantly, then, this dhikr of Allah embellishes his deed and makes it acceptable.

The sense of the verse: *وَمَا يُعَمَّرُ مِنْ مُعَمَّرٍ وَلَا يُنْقَصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ* (And no aged person is made to advance in age, nor a part is curtailed from his age, but all this is (recorded) in a book - 35:11), according to the majority of the commentators is that if Allah Ta'ālā blesses a person with a long age, it is a fact already on record in the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*). Similarly, when the age of a certain person is kept at a lower mark in terms of the number of years, that too already stands recorded in *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*. The outcome of it all is that the text, at this place, is not referring to one individual person's age being long or short, instead, the statement relates to humankind as a whole, in the sense that some individuals from it are given long ages and others, a comparatively

shorter ones. The explanation has been reported by Ibn Kathīr from Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه. Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ reports the same saying from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Daḥḥak. Therefore, in general books of Tafsīr, such as, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Kathīr, Rāḥ ul-Ma‘ānī and others, this very explanation has been declared as the view of the majority of commentators. However, some early commentators have said: Should the length of age concerns one single person, then, decrease in age would mean that the age of every person as already written by Allah Ta‘ālā is certain, and every day that passes decreases one day from this pre-fixed age. If two days pass, two days decrease. In the same way, every day, in fact, every single breath keeps decreasing one's age. This Tafsīr or explanation has been reported from Sha‘bi, Ibn Jubayr, Abū Mālīk, Ibn ‘Atiyyah and Suddiyy. (Rūḥ ul-Ma‘ānī)

This subject has been succinctly expressed in an Arabic couplet as:

حَيَاتِكَ أَنْفَاسٌ تُعَدُّ فَكُلَّمَا.....☆..... مَضَى نَفْسٌ مِنْهَا انْتَقَصَتْ بِهِ جُزْءٌ

Your life is (the name of) counted breaths. So, whenever passes away a breath from it, a part of it decreases.

In his explanation of this verse, Imām an-Nasa‘ī has reported from Sayyidnā Anas Ibn Mālīk رضي الله عنه that he heard the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم saying, "مَنْ سَرَّهُ، أَنْ يُسَاطَ لَهُ، فِي رِزْقِهِ وَوَيْسَاءَ فِي آثَرِهِ فَلْيَبْصُلْ رَجْمَهُ" This Ḥadīth has also been reported by al-Bukhari, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd on the authority of a narration from Yūnus Ibn Yazid Ayli. The Ḥadīth means: 'He who wishes that his sustenance and age is increased should treat his close relatives well (*Ṣilatu-r-raḥim*).' This obviously suggests that the these deeds increase one's age. But, another Ḥadīth given below has itself clarified its sense:

Ibn Abī Ḥatim reports from Sayyidnā Abū-d-Darda' رضي الله عنه. He says, 'when we mentioned this (subject) before the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, he said, "(Age as such is already fixed and determined by Allah), when the fixed term is over, no one is given the least respite. In fact, increase in age means ( in the Ḥadīth cited above) that Allah Ta‘ālā blesses one with good children who keep praying for him. This person is not there anymore, but he keeps receiving their prayers in his grave (that is, he keeps on receiving the benefits one would have received if one were alive. Thus, in a way, his age has increased)". (Both narrations appearing above have been