

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 49-61

(٤٩) وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُدَبُّونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذَلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ

(٥٠) وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمْ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

(٥١) وَإِذْ وَعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ثُمَّ اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ

(٥٢) ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنْكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

(٥٣) وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ الْكِتَابَ وَالْفُرْقَانَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

(٥٤) وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ أِنَّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ بِاتِّخَاذِكُمُ الْعِجْلَ فَتُوبُوا إِلَىٰ بَارئِكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِنْدَ بَارئِكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

(٥٥) وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَىٰ اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ
وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

(٥٦) ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاكُم مِّن بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

(٥٧) وَظَلَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْغَمَامَ وَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّاءَ وَالسَّلْوَىٰ كُلُّوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا
رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَكِن كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

(٥٨) وَإِذْ قُلْنَا ادْخُلُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ رَغَدًا وَاَدْخُلُوا الْبَابَ
سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ نَّغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطَايَاكُمْ وَسَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

(٥٩) فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا رِجْزًا
مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ

(٦٠) وَإِذْ اسْتَسْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ فَانفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا
عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرِبَهُمْ كُلُّوا وَاشْرَبُوا مِن رِّزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي
الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

(٦١) وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نَّصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ فَادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا مِمَّا
تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ مِن بَقْلِهَا وَقِثَّائِهَا وَفُومِهَا وَعَدَسُهَا وَبَصِلَهَا قَالَ أَرَأَيْتُمْ أَيُّهَا الَّذِي هُوَ
أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ أَهْبَطُوا مِصْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ مَّا سَأَلْتُمْ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ
وَالْمَسْكَنَةُ وَبَآؤُوا بِغَضَبِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ بَأْنَهُمْ كَانُوا يُكْفُرُونَ بآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ
النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ذَلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ

And when We delivered you from Pharaoh's people, who subjected you to severe torment, killing your sons and sparing your women, and in this there was a great trial from your Lord (49).

And when We parted the sea for you, so We saved you and drowned the followers of Pharaoh while you watched by (50).

And when We appointed (a time of) forty nights with M^usa, then you took the calf (for a god) after him and you were unjust (51) ;

then We pardoned you after that so that you might give thanks (52).

And when We gave M^usa the book and the distinction that you might walk aright (53).

And when M^usa said to his people: "O my people! you have surely been unjust to yourselves by taking the calf (for a god), therefore turn to your Creator (penitently) and kill your people, that is best for you with your Creator; so He turned to you (mercifully), for surely He is the Oftreturning (with mercy), the Merciful" (54).

And when you said: "O M^usa! we will not believe in you until we see Allah manifestly, " so the punishment overtook you while you looked on (55);

then We raised you up after your death that you may give thanks (56).

And We made the clouds to give shade over you and We sent to you manna and quails: Eat of good things that We have given you; and they did not do Us any harm, but they did harm their own selves (57).

And when We said: "Enter this city, then eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish, and enter the gate making obeisance, and say, forgiveness, We will forgive you your wrongs and give more to those who do good (to others) (58).

But those who were unjust changed it for a saying other than that which had been spoken to them, so We sent upon those who were unjust a pestilence from heaven, because they transgressed (59).

And when M^usa prayed for drink for his people, We said: "Strike the rock with your staff." So there gushed from it twelve springs; each tribe knew its drinking place: "Eat and drink of the provisions of Allah and do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief" (60).

And when you said: "O M^usa! we cannot bear with one food, therefore pray to your Lord on our behalf to bring forth for us out of what the earth grows, of its herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions. He said: "Will you exchange that which is better for that which is worse? Enter a city, so you will have what you ask for. " And abasement and humiliation were brought down upon them and they returned with Allah's wrath; this was so because they

disbelieved in the signs of Allah and killed the prophets unjustly; this was so because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits (61).

Commentary

Qur'an: and sparing your women: They left your women alive in order that they (i.e. the women) might serve them. “*al-Istihya*” (الاستحياء) means to wish someone to remain alive. The word may also mean: They behaved indecently with the women until they (i.e. the women) lost their modesty.

“*Yasūmūnakum*” (يسومونكم) translated here as “they subjected you to”, literally means, they imposed upon you.

Qur'an: And when We parted the sea for you: *al-Farq* (الفرق) is opposite of *al-jam'* (الجمع); the words mean to separate and to gather, respectively. The same is the case of *al-fasl* (الفصل) vis-a-vis “*al-wasl*” (الوصل). To separate the sea means to part its water. “*Bikum*” (بكم), translated here as “for you”, may also mean, “Soon on your entering the sea”.

Qur'an: And when We appointed (a time of) forty days with M^{sa}: The same event has been described in Chapter 7 in these words:

And We appointed with M^{sa} a time of thirty nights and completed them with ten(more), so the appointed time of his Lord was complete, forty nights (7 : 142).

This verse mentions the total duration of the two promises together, as a tradition says.

Qur'an: therefore turn to your Creator (penitently): *al-Bari'* (الباريء) is one of the beautiful names of Allah, as Allah says:

He is Allah, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most beautiful names. . . (59:24).

This name has been used three times in the Qur'an: twice in the verse under discussion and once in Chapter 59, quoted just above. Perhaps Allah used this name here because it was most suitable in the context of the event described.

While it is nearer in meaning to *al-Khaliq* (الخالق = the Creator) and *al-M^{ajid}* (الموجد = the Inventor), it is derived from *bara'a, yabra'u, bar'an* (برء يبرء برء = he separated, he separates, to separate).

Allah thus separates His creation from inexistence, or He separates man from the earth. This name in this context conveys the following idea: No doubt it is very hard to repent by killing your own people. But Allah, Who now orders you to destroy yourselves by killing, is the same God who had created you. He was pleased to create you when it was good for you; and now He has decreed that you should kill your own people, and this order too is good for you.

How can He decide anything for you except that which is good, and He is your Maker and Creator. The phrase, “your Creator”, points to a special relation which they have with Him, and it emphasizes the fact that the given command is not for revenge; it is based on divine love, in order to purify them.

Qur'an: *that is best for you with your Creator:* This and the preceding verses (that enumerate their transgressions and sins) are addressed to the whole Jewish nation, although the sins were committed by only some groups of them and not by all. Obviously it is because they were very much united as a nation; if one did a thing, others were pleased with it.

It was because of this feeling of their national unity that one group's action is attributed to the whole nation. Otherwise, not all the Israelites had killed the prophets, nor had all of them indulged in the calf-worship, or committed other sins mentioned herein.

It proves that the order, “kill your people”, actually meant, kill some of your people, i.e., the calf-worshippers. It may also be inferred from the words, “you have surely been unjust to yourselves by taking the calf for worship”, and the words, “that is best for you with your Creator” (which apparently is the final part of the speech of M^usa).

The words, “so He turned to you (mercifully)”, prove that their repentance was accepted. Tradition says that their repentance was accepted and sin forgiven when only a few of them had been killed.

This forgiveness before the order was fully complied with shows that the command was given as a trial. The case is somewhat similar to the dream of Ibrah^um (a.s.) and his being told to sacrifice Isma^u1; before he could reach the ultimate stage, he was told,

O Ibrah^um! You have indeed made the vision come true (37:104 - 105).

Likewise, M^usa (a.s.) told his people “turn to your Creator (penitently) and kill your people, that is best for you with your Creator”, and Allah confirmed the order, yet He took the killing of some as equal to the execution of all, and informed them that their repentance was accepted, “so He turned to you (mercifully)”.

Qur'an: *a pestilence from heaven:* “*ar-Rijz*” (الرجز = punishment).

Qur'an: *do not act corruptly:* “*La ta'thaw*” (لا تعثوا) is derived from *al-`ayth* and *al-`athy* (العَيْثُ، العَثَى) it means the biggest chaos and mischief.

Qur'an: *and its cucumbers and its garlic:* “*al-Khiyar*” (الخيار) is cucumber; “*al-fum*” (الفوم) is garlic or wheat.

Qur'an: *and they returned with Allah's wrath:* “*Ba'aw*” (باءوا = they returned).

Qur'an: *this was so because they disbelieved:* It gives the reason of preceding statement; and the

next sentence, “this was so because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits” is the reason of that reason. Their disobedience and perennial excesses caused them to reject the signs of Allah and kill the prophets. Allah says in another verse:

Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the signs of Allah and used to mock them (30: 10).

How was the disbelief caused by disobedience? One of the coming Tradition explains it.

Tradition

Abū Ja'far (a.s.) said about the words of Allah: *and when We appointed (a time of) forty nights with Mūsā*: “It was thirty nights in the (divine) knowledge and measure, then something else happened (to show that it was not the final decree) and Allah added ten more; and in this way the appointed time of his Lord, the first and the last, was completed forty days.”¹

The author says: This tradition supports what we have mentioned earlier that the forty was the total of the two appointed times.

‘Alī (a.s.) said about the words of Allah: ***and when Mūsā said to his people: “O my people! you have surely been unjust to yourselves. . . ”: “They asked Mūsā: ‘How should we repent?’ He said: ‘Some of you should kill the others.’***

Thereupon, they took the knives and everyone started killing (the others), even his brother, father and son, without caring, by God! whom he killed. (It continued) till seventy thousand of them were killed. Then Allah revealed to Mūsā: ***‘Tell them to stay their hands;’ and he who was killed was forgiven and he who remained, his repentance was accepted.*** ”²

The Imam said: “Mūsā (a.s.) went to the appointed place and time, and then came back to his people; and they had started worshipping the calf; then he told them: ***‘O my people! you have surely been unjust to yourselves by taking the calf (for worship), therefore turn to your Creator (penitently) and kill your people, that is best for you with your Creator.’***

They asked him: ‘How should we kill our people?’ Mūsā said to them: ‘Tomorrow everyone of you should come to Baytu ‘1–Maqdis with a knife or a piece of iron or a sword; when I ascend the pulpit of the Children of Israel you should all keep your faces hidden, so that nobody should recognize the other at his side; then you should kill each other.’ Thus seventy thousand of those who had worshipped the calf assembled in Baytu ‘1–Maqdis.

When Musa finished praying with them and ascended the pulpit, they started killing each other. (This continued) until Jibrīl came down and said: ‘Now tell them, O Mūsā! to stop killing (each other), because Allah has accepted their repentance.’

And (by that time) ten thousand of them had been killed. And Allah revealed: ***that is best for you with your Creator; so He turned to you*** (mercifully), ***for surely His is Oftreturning*** (with mercy), ***the Merciful.*** ”⁴

The author says: According to this tradition, the sentence, “that is best for you with your Creator”, was said by Mūsā (a.s.) and was also used in the divine speech. In this way, Allah confirmed the word of Mūsā (a.s.), and made it clear that what had actually happened – the execution of ten thousand calf-worshippers – was all that was intended from the very beginning; and that the order of Musa was carried out in full, and not partially.

According to what appears from the wording of Mūsā (a.s.) , it was best for them if all of them were killed; but only some of them got killed, not all. By repeating the same words, Allah made it clear that what Mūsā (a.s.) had meant from the words, “the best for you”, was not the execution of all.

The same *at-Tafsīr* says about the words of Allah: ***and We made the clouds to give shade over you:*** “When Mūsā crossed the sea with the Israelites, they landed at a desert. They said: ‘O Mūsā! you have really destroyed and killed us, by bringing us from an inhabited land to a desert where there is, either any shadow or tree nor even water.’

At daytime a cloud appeared over them to protect them from the sun; and at night, manna came down to them, settling on leaves, trees and stones, and they ate it; and at dinner time roasted birds fell on their dinner-spread, and when they finished eating and drinking, the birds (became alive and) flew away.

And Mūsā had a stone which he used to place in the midst of the station (of the caravan), striking it with his walking-stick and, lo! Twelve springs gushed from it, as Allah described, every spring going to the station of a particular tribe – and they were twelve tribes.”⁵

Abu I-Hasan al-Madīnī (a.s.) said about the words of Allah: ***and they did not do Us any harm but they did harm their own selves:*** “Surely Allah is too powerful and too unassailable to be harmed or to ascribe any harm to Himself.

But He has joined us to Himself and took any injustice done to us as an injustice done to Him, and treated our love as His love; then He revealed it in a (verse of the) Qur’an to His Prophet, and said: ***and they did not do Us any harm, but they did harm their own selves.*** The narrator says: “I said, ‘This is the revelation?’ He said, ‘Yes.’”⁶

The author says: Nearly the same thing has been narrated from al-Baqir (a.s.).

“. . . too unassailable to be harmed ”: It is the explanation of the Qur’anic expression, “they did not do Us any harm”; the next sentence, “or to ascribe any harm to Himself”, rejects also the opposite proposition. Allah can neither be harmed nor does He do any injustice Himself. Why did the narrator ask the question, “This is the revelation?”

Obviously, for a negative sentence to be plausible there should be a real or hypothetic possibility of a positive connection between the subject and its predicate. We do not say, “This wall does not see”. Why? Because wall has no possible connection with seeing. Now, Allah can have no possible connection at all with injustice or oppression.

Therefore, the sentence, “they did not do Us any harm”, would seem a superfluous and implausible assertion, because there was no need for saying that Allah could not be harmed nor did He harm anyone – unless it was meant to convey some fine point to the listeners.

And that point is this: Great persons often speak on behalf of their servants and dependants; likewise, Allah in this verse is speaking on behalf of Muhammad and his progeny (peace be on them all), joining them to Himself in this declaration.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) recited the verse: ***this was so because they disbelieved in the signs of Allah and killed the prophets unjustly; this was so because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits***, and then said:

“By God, they did not hit them with their hands, nor did they kill them with their swords; but they heard their talks and announced it (to their enemies); so the prophets were caught on that charge and killed; this was the killing, the exceeding the limit and the disobedience.”⁷

The author says: A similar tradition from the same Imam is found in *al-Kafi*. Apparently, the Imam inferred it from the words, “this was so because they disobeyed . . .” Needless to say that murder, and especially of the prophets, and rejection of the signs of Allah cannot be termed as mere disobedience.

It should be the other way round. But if we take the disobedience to mean disclosing the secrets then it would be perfectly right to say that they killed the prophets, because they (disobeyed them and) did not keep their secrets and thus delivered them into the hands of their enemies who killed them.

1. al-`Ayyash

2. ad-Durru 'l-manth

3. M^usa was called to the Mount Sini'i and given Torah while the Israelites were still in the wilderness. And it was at that time that the events in question took place. They had not entered Palestine at that time and Baytu '1-Maqdis was not built yet. Therefore, the word “Baytu '1-Maqdis” used in this tradition must mean the tent which M^usa erected for divine worship.

4. at-Tafs^{ir}, al-Qummi

5. at-Tafs^{ir}, al-Qummi

6. al- Kafi

7. al-`Ayyash

<https://www.al-islam.org/al-mizan-exegesis-quran-vol-1-allamah-tabatabai/suratul-baqarah-verses-49-61>