

Section 2: Allah Saves Noah and His Followers

Surah al-Mu'minun – Verse 23

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ

23. “And indeed We sent Noah unto his folk, and he said: ‘O’ my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god save Him. Will you not keep from evil?’ ”

In the previous verses, Allah spoke of the creation of man and what supplies his material needs. Now in these verses, He attends to the supply of man’s intellectual and doctrinal food.

In other words, the previous noble verses mentioned monotheism, knowledge of Allah, and the reasons of His majesty in the world of creation. This matter has been told from the mouths of the great prophets and by using the events that have unfolded in their history in this verse and the ones that follow.

It first begins with Noah, an arch-prophet and the bearer of the news of monotheism, the verse says:

“And indeed We sent Noah unto his folk, and he said: ‘O’ my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god save Him. Will you not keep from evil?’ ”

To serve other than Allah is impiety and recklessness.

Surah al-Mu'minun – Verse 24

فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا هَذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتَفَضَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَذَا فِي آبَائِنَا الْأَوَّلِينَ

24. “But the chiefs of those who disbelieved from among his people said: ‘This is nothing but a mortal like you who intends to gain superiority over you. And if Allah had pleased (to send any prophet), He surely could have sent down angels. We have not heard of this (invitation) among our ancestors of old’.”

The elite were the most intractable of those who opposed the prophets.

The prophets (as) had come to guide mankind but the unbelievers used to say that a heavenly messenger should not be a human being! Because of this the rich and conceited elite among Noah’s folk, used to say: This is only a mortal like you who seeks to dominate you.

The verse says:

“But the chiefs of those who disbelieved from among his people said: ‘This is nothing but a mortal like you who intends to gain superiority over you...”

Thus, they saw Noah’s humanity as a defect and accused him of self aggrandizement and that all he had said about Allah, about monotheism and religion, were merely plots to achieve this aim.

Then they added:

“...And if Allah had pleased (to send any prophet), He surely could have sent down angels...”

And, to complete this unfounded argument, they said:

“...We have not heard of this (invitation) among our ancestors of old’.”

Of course, when facing correct logic, one must not rely on national culture and the imitation of one’s ancestors to defend the existing situation, instead one must follow the Divine call of His prophet.

Surah al-Mu’minun - Verses 25-26

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ فْتَرِيصُوا بِهِ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ

قَالَ رَبِّ انصُرْنِي بِمَا كَذَّبُونَ

25. "He is just a man in whom is a madness, so bear with him for a while."

26. "He (Noah) said: 'My Lord! help me against what they Belie'."

Obstinacy and conceit lead some individuals to attribute madness to their prophet, the wisest of people. The elite among the blasphemers imagine the call of the prophets to be a mental aberration and ask others to wait until he ceases asserting his claims.

("...so bear with him for a while.")

These baseless words, however, did not affect the soul of this great prophet, and Noah continued his mission without the slightest sign of self aggrandizement in what was he doing.

When they saw that their accusations were not supported by reality they made another accusation, saying that he was insane, a charge that had been leveled upon all Divine prophets and veracious leaders in the course of history.

They said:

"He is just a man in whom is a madness, so bear with him for a while."

It is very interesting that they used the Arabic word /jinnatun/ (a kind of madness) in the accusation they leveled at this great arch-prophet, suppressing the fact that the life and speeches of this prophet were the best indicators of his knowledge and reasonableness.

In truth, they intended to say that, granted his behavior might be correct and sound, but madness could have many faces among which is that very appearance of reasonableness and knowledge.

The Qur'anic sentence /fa tarabbasu bihi hatta hin/

("...so bear with him for a while")

may refer to the possibility that they were anticipating Noah's death when they would get peace of mind; or it may mean that they were waiting until he was cured from the sickness of madness that they had attributed to him!

At any rate, they made three kinds of unfounded and paradoxical accusations, each of which they advanced as a reason to deny his prophecy:

1) The claim of prophecy by a human being is a lie! Such a phenomenon is unprecedented.

"...And if Allah had pleased, He surely could have sent down angels"

2) He is a man who seeks after self-aggrandizement and uses this claim to gain it.

3) He does not have sound reason and what he says is due to insanity.

Since the answer of these baseless accusations and objections is obvious, and is mentioned in other verses of the Holy Qur'an, no more is said by the Qur'an about it here.

It stands to reason that naturally a leader of human beings must himself be a human being, for he should existentially be cognizant of the needs, pains and problems of being human. Moreover, the prophets had always been human in their nature.

On the other hand, it is clearly understood from the lives of the prophets that brotherliness, humility, and the absence of any form of self aggrandizement have been of their most outstanding attributes, and their reason, intelligence and insight were not unknown to their foes for they acknowledged them in their own words.

Noah's enemies did not confine their molestation and annoyance to leveling unjust accusations against him. From other verses of the Qur'an it is understood that they put great pressure on him in other ways as well. Noah tried his best to guide and save them from the clutches of blasphemy and polytheism.

When he despaired in his efforts, he asked for Allah's help, as we read in the verse which says:

"He (Noah) said: 'My Lord! help me against what they belie'."

Of course, he asked Allah's help for the victory of faith over disbelief, not for the victory of himself as an individual over another. Therefore, he said: "Help me against what they belie" and he did not say help me against them.

Surah al-Mu'minun - Verse 27

فَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ أَنْ اصْنَعِ الْفُلَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحَيْنَا فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُّورُ فَاسْلُكْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَاطِنٍ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَا تُخَاطِبُنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُغْرَقُونَ

27. "Then We revealed unto him: 'Build the Ark before Our eyes and (according to) Our revelation. Then, when Our command comes and the oven gushes (water), take into it a pair of every kind (of animal) and (also) your family, except those of them against whom the word has already gone forth. And plead not with Me on behalf of those who are unjust, for verily they shall be drowned."

Imam Baqir (as) said:

"Noah (as) called people to monotheism both secretly and openly for 950 years, until Allah told him:

‘...None of your People will believe except those who have believed already...’¹

Then Noah said:

‘... they will mislead Your servants and will beget none save lewd ungrateful (children)’² ³

Then Allah issued the command for him to make the Ark and preparations were made to save Noah and his few companions and to destroy the obstinate polytheists. So He says:

“Then We revealed unto him: ‘Build the Ark before Our eyes and (according to) Our revelation...”

The Qur’anic phrase /bi ’a’yunina/ (before Our eyes) refers to the fact that Noah’s effort and endeavor for this end was in the presence of Allah (s.w.t.) and He supported him, so Noah continued his task with a tranquil soul and without being afraid of or concerned about anything.

The Arabic word /wahyina/ (Our revelation) shows that Noah learned the technique of making the Ark through the Divine revelation. Such a thing (as history shows) was unprecedented at that time. Consequently, Noah made the ship according to Allah’s direction, so it did not fall short of perfection for his aim.

The verse continues saying:

“...Then, when Our command comes and the oven gushes (water), take into it a pair of every kind (of animal) and (also) your family, except those of them against whom the word has already gone forth...”

(This last sentence refers to Noah’s wife and one of his children)

Then the Qur’an adds:

“...And plead not with Me on behalf of those who are unjust, for verily they shall be drowned.”

Of course, this warning was because Noah could have been moved by human sentiments or fatherly affection that might lead him (as) to intercede on behalf of them while they no longer deserved intercession.

Surah al-Mu’minun – Verses 28-30

فَإِذَا اسْتَوَيْتَ أَنْتَ وَمَنْ مَعَكَ عَلَى الْفُلِكِ فَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي نَجَّانَا مِنَ الْقَوْمِ
الظَّالِمِينَ

وَقُلْ رَبِّ أَنْزِلْنِي مُنْزَلًا مُبَارَكًا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْمُنْزِلِينَ

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ وَإِن كُنَّا لَمُبْتَلِينَ

28. “And when you, and those with you, are settled on the Ark, say: ‘all praise belongs to Allah Who has delivered us from the unjust people!’ ”

29. “And say: ‘My Lord! Cause me to land with a blessed landing, for You are the Best to cause to land’.”

30. “Verily in this there are signs; and indeed We put (men) to test.”

First, we must be grateful to Allah for all His previous blessings then we ask Him for a new favour. The historical subjects of The Holy Qur’an are guiding signs and a cause for our development, they are not for the purposes of entertainment or for simple story telling.

In this noble verse, addressing Noah, Allah said:

“And when you, and those with you, are settled on the Ark, say: ‘All praise belongs to Allah Who has delivered us from the unjust people!’ ”

Then in the second verse, Noah is told that after praising Allah for the first great blessing, that is being saved from the clutches of the oppressors, he should beseech Allah in this way:

“And say: ‘My Lord! Cause me to land with a blessed landing, for You are the Best to cause to land’.”

The Arabic word /manzil/ perhaps here is a noun of place, that is to say that after the storm ended Allah would land Noah’s ship on a land that was blessed with abundant favours, so that he could live on it comfortably.

It may also be an infinitive, that is to say that Allah would land Noah’s Ark with a good way, because after that the storm ended, many dangers would face the ship when it was about to land, such as the lack of a proper place to live, the shortage of food, and different kinds of diseases, so Noah asked Allah to land the ship with a blessed landing.

Finally, the last verse of this group of verses refers to the whole story in which Noah overcome the oppressors; and the severe punishment of these people is considered as a sign for the possessors of intellect.

The verse says:

“Verily in this there are signs; and indeed We put (men) to test.”

The above sentence may indicate that Allah frequently tested the people of Noah and when they could not pass the test, He caused them to perish.

It may also point out that Allah tests all mankind in every age, and the verses above are not only peculiar to the people of Noah’s age. Mankind is tested in various forms in all ages and, as a result of them, those who are thorns on the way of human development are removed, so that humanity would continue its journey of perfection unhindered.

It is interesting that in the verses above, only the making the Ark and the embarkation of Noah and his companions are mentioned. Details of what ultimately happened to the wrongdoers is not mentioned in the Qur’an, but by the Divine promise which says:

“...verily they shall be drowned”

It becomes certain that such a fate befell them, for Allah’s promise is always fulfilled.

It is also necessary to mention that more information about the story of Noah and his struggle with the unbelieving people of his folk, as well as the events of making Ark, gushing water, the occurrence of the storm, and when Noah’s son was drowned, there are much explanation which can be found in the books about the history of the prophets.

Surah al-Mu’minun - Verses 31-32

ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ قَرْنًا آخَرِينَ

فَأَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ

31. “Then, after them, We produced another generation;”

32. “And We sent among them a messenger from among themselves (saying): ‘Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him. Will you not keep from evil?’ ”

As His way of treatment, Allah has appointed a prophet for every nation.

The prophet must be from among the people themselves, so that they have a practiced and forbearing example among them. Thus, these verses discuss upon the nations that have come after Noah (as) and explain their gloomy fate. They also show that the logic of the unbelievers of later generations were

similar to those of the former generations.

At first, it says:

“Then, after them, We produced another generation;”

The Arabic word /qarn/ is derived from the word /'iqtirān/, which means proximity, therefore the generation that lives in a particular single age is called a 'qarn'. Sometimes the time, characterized by a certain generation, in Arabic is called a 'qarn'.

The measurement of the length of a 'qarn' as 30 to 100 years is only a convention and is dependent upon the traditions of various nations.

Then the next holy verse implies that since man cannot be without a Divine leader, Allah sent a great prophet to them that he would teach them monotheism, the religion of Truth and justice, and would call people to them, as the verse says:

“And We sent among them a messenger from among themselves (saying): ‘Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him. Will you not keep from evil?’ ”

This is what has formed the basis of the call of all Divine prophets. Indeed it has been the call of monotheism that has formed the main substructure of all individual and social reformations.

Then the prophet asks the question whether they would not shun polytheism and idol worship, when they are called to monotheism:

(... Will you not keep from evil?)

The prophet and the nation, to which he had been sent, have not been identified in the Qur'an, but with regards to their identities in other verses of the Qur'an, there are two possibilities offered by the commentators:

1) It was the people of Thamud who used to live in an area located in the north of Hijaz, whose prophet was Salih, a great Divine prophet that was appointed to guide those people. They disbelieved in his message and rebelled and were finally destroyed by a heavenly cry (or a deadly thunderbolt).

The evidence of this interpretation is the punishment of the Cry which is mentioned at the end of the holy verses under consideration, and it is also found in Sura Hud, No. 11, verse 67 which clearly is about the people of Salih.

2) It was the people of 'Aad whose prophet was Hud. Their story is told in other verses of the Holy Qur'an immediately after the story of Noah (as). This itself is a flame of evidence whereby it is possible to interpret the holy verse mentioned above in this way.

However, considering that this nation's punishment was a very fierce wind that continued for seven nights and eight days destroying them, as verses 6 and 7 of Sura Al-Haqqah have mentioned, it becomes clear that the first interpretation is more correct.

Anyway, we see what the reaction of this obstinate nation was to this great prophet's call of monotheism.

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1. Sura Hud, No. 11, verse 36
 2. Sura Noah, No. 71, verse 27
 3. Bihar, Vol. 11, p. 331

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