

Section 4: What Happened to the Disbeliever People in the Past

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 35

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا مَعَهُ أَخَاهُ هَارُونَ وَزِيرًا

35. “And indeed We gave Moses the Book and We appointed His brother Aaron with him (as his) assistant.”

This noble verse sympathizes on one hand with the Prophet (S) and the believers, and on the other hand it threatens pretext-seeking polytheists the kind of whose words were somehow mentioned in the previous verses.

It also refers to the history of previous nations and their gloomy destiny and it specially puts emphasis on six nations (Pharaohs, Noah’s nation, the people of ‘Ad and Thamūd, the people of Lūṭ, and the people of the Ditch).

It concisely expresses lessons from the destiny of these nations.

It says:

“And indeed We gave Moses the Book and We appointed His brother Aaron with him (as his) assistant.”

For these two had a difficult and important duty on their shoulder for struggling with Pharaoh people and they had to do this revolutionary job with the help of each other.

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 36

فَقُلْنَا اذْهَبَا إِلَى الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَدَمَّرْنَا هُمْ تَدْمِيرًا

36. “And We said: ‘Go you both unto the people who have rejected Our signs!’ so We destroyed them with utter destruction.”

Narrating the history and the explanation of the destiny of former pagans and the statement of their destruction, works as warning for today pagans and prohibiting them from what is unlawful.

Therefore, in this noble verse, Allah says:

“And We said: ‘Go you both unto the people who have rejected Our signs!’...”

On one hand, they practically denied divine revelations and Allah’s signs which exist in macrocosm and microcosm and the entire universe, and began to worship idols and to be polytheist. On the other hand, they neglected the teachings of the previous prophets and denied them.

In spite of Moses and his brother’s attempts, and struggles and great and various miracles they observed, they stuck to their paganism and denial of the Truth, so they were destroyed.

The verse continues saying:

“...so We destroyed them with utter destruction.”

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 37

وَقَوْمَ نُوحٍ لَمَّا كَذَبُوا الرُّسُلَ أَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا هُمْ لِلنَّاسِ آيَةً وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ
عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا

37. “And the people of Noah, when they rejected the messengers, We drowned them and made them a sign for mankind; and We have prepared for the unjust a painful chastisement.”

The Qur’an implies that when the people of Noah denied the Divine messengers Allah drowned them and made their fate as a lesson for human beings.

The verse says:

“And the people of Noah, when they rejected the messengers, We drowned them and made them a sign for mankind...”

It is interesting that the Holy Qur’an says:

“...they rejected the messengers (not only one messenger)...”

For, there is not any difference in principles between the call of messengers and prophets of Allah. If one of them is denied, it means that all of them are denied. Moreover, those people were basically against the call of all divine prophets and they denied all religions.

Anyway, the denial of prophets has got both worldly chastisement and the Hereafter punishment.

The holy verse continues saying:

“...and We have prepared for the unjust a painful chastisement.”

Surah al-Furqan – Verses 38–39

وَعَادًا وَثَمُودَ وَأَصْحَابَ الرَّسِّ وَقُرُونًا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ كَثِيرًا

وَكُلًّا ضَرَبْنَا لَهُ الْأَمْثَالَ وَكُلًّا تَبَّرْنَا تَتْبِيرًا

38. “And the (tribes of) ‘Ad and Thamūd and the men of Ar-Rass, and many generations between them.”

39. “And unto each of them We did give examples, and every one (of them) We did destroy with utter extermination.”

The Arabic word /qurūn/ is the plural form of the word /qarn/ that, in fact, means a group of people who live together in a certain time. Also it is applied to 40 years up to 100 years. The Qur’anic word /tatbir/ means to lose dignity and respect and to get overthrown in a way that it leads to destruction. 1

So, in this verse, it says:

“And the (tribes of) ‘Ad and Thamūd and the men of Ar-Rass, and many generations between them.”

The tribe of ‘Ad is the people of Hūd, the Divine prophet, who was appointed in the land of ‘Ahqaf, (Yemen). The tribe of Thamūd is the people of Salih, the Divine prophet, who was appointed in the land

of Wad-il-Qura, a place between Medina and Damascus.

There are many things cited about the people of Ar-Rass in commentaries: they are people of Shuayb (Jethro). Ar Rass is a city in Yamameh. Or it is a place in 'Antakiyah, Al-Zakakih, or Aras River in Iran.

But in the book 'Uyūn-i-Akhbar ur-Rida we read:

Imam Rida (as) said:

"A person asked Imam Ali (as) about them.

And Imam Ali (as) said:

'After Noah Flood, a tree named 'Shah Drakht' (King Tree) was planted. People counted this tree holy and built 12 hamlets around it. The names of these hamlets were the names of Iranian months: Farwardin, Ordibehisht, Khordad, Tir, Mordad, Shahriwar, Mihr, 'Aban, 'Azar, Day, Bahman, Isfand.

Each month they held festival in one of them. Of course the festival in hamlet of 'Isfand was more splendid and more people gathered. In that festival, they put fire to a tree and when its smoke went up into air, they began to cry and shed tear.

Allah sent them a prophet who guided and advised them, but they denied him. Their prophet cast curse on them and that holy tree got dried. Then they dug a deep well and threw Allah's prophet into it, and in this way he was martyred." 2

But it is understood from the 180th sermon of Nahj-ul-Balaqah that they did not have only one prophet, for the

Imam (as) said:

"Where are the people of the cities of Ar-Rass who killed the prophets and suspended the traditions of the Divine messengers and revived the traditions of the despots?..."

The next verse implies that Allah did not punish them astonishingly: but it says:

"And unto each of them We did give examples..."

Allah answered their criticisms as was done about the criticisms upon the Prophet (S). Allah made divine ordinances clear for them and explained the truths of the religion. Allah warned them and retold them the stories and destiny of the former nations.

But when none of these was effective the status was as the verse says:

"...and every one (of them) We did destroy with utter extermination."

Yes the divine way of treatment is to send messengers for guiding people and to destruct their rejecters.

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 40

وَلَقَدْ أَتَوْا عَلَى الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي أَمْطَرَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا مَطَرًا سَوِيًّا ۖ أَفَلَمْ يَكُونُوا يَرَوْنَهَا بَلْ كَانُوا لَا
يَرْجُونَ نُشُورًا

40. “And indeed they have passed by the town on which was rained an evil rain, did they not then see it? Nay! They did not hope to be raised again.”

The purpose of ‘the township whereon was rained the evil rain’ is the town of the people of Lūt on which stone rained.

As Imam Baqir (as) says, it was an area that was called Sadūm. Therefore, ancient places can provide people lesson (and narration of history and retelling the story of misled; persons can be a ground for propagation, training and prohibition of doing evil).

Finally ruins of cities of Lūt nation that have been on the way of people going from Hijaz to Damascus are mentioned in this verse. It is a live tableau that describes the painful destiny of these misled persons and polytheists.

It says:

“And indeed they have passed by the town on which was rained an evil rain, did they not then see it? Nay! They did not hope to be raised again.”

They count death as the end of this life. If even they believe in the life after death, their belief will be so weak and baseless that it has no effect on their soul, and also, no effect on their life programs.

Therefore, they belittle everything and think about nothing but passing their low desires.

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 41

وَإِذَا رَأَوْكَ إِذٍ يَتَخَدُّونَكَ إِلَّا هُزُوعًا ۗ أَلَيْسَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ اللَّهُ رَسُولًا

41. “And when they see you, they take you for aught but a mockery; (saying:) ‘Is this the one whom Allah has sent us a messenger?’”

Ridiculing and belittling prophets is the permanent method of pagans. One who is stubborn and

conceited does not accept the Truth.

The verses under discussion mention another example of polytheists' logic and the quality of their treatment with the Prophet of Islam (S) and his true call.

It first says:

“And when they see you, they take you for aught but a mockery; (saying:) ‘Is this the one whom Allah has sent us a messenger?’”

Polytheists say: what a great claim he makes! What strange words he says! It is really ridiculous.

But it must not be forgotten that the Prophet (S) was the person who had lived for forty years among them before he was appointed as prophet. He was famous for his intelligence in sight, trustworthiness, frankness and truthfulness, but when the chiefs of polytheists saw that their interests were threatened, they forgot all of them.

They ridiculed the call of the Prophet (S) and even they accused him of insanity, though he presented them clear reasons and evidences.

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 42

إِن كَادَ لَيُضِلُّنَا عَنْ آلِهَتِنَا لَوْلَا أَن صَبَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا وَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ حِينَ يَرَوْنَ
الْعَذَابَ مَنْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

42. “He would have led us astray from our gods if we had not been staunch to them!’ And soon they will know, when they see the chastisement, who is it that is most misled in path.”

Patience and resistance is not always a value and merit.

Sometimes it is stubbornness and obstinacy such as resistance and patience in being misled and deviation.

So the Qur'an mentions the rest of pagans' words in this way:

“He would have led us astray from our gods if we had not been staunch to them!’...”

But the Holy Qur'an answers them in some ways.

It first answers this group of people, who were not logical, with, a striking sentence:

“...And soon they will know, when they see the chastisement, who is it that is most misled in

path.”

This doom may refer to the punishment of the Hereafter, as some commentators, such as Tabarsi in Majma‘ul-Bayan, say. Or it is the punishment of this world, such as the defeat in Badr war and such like, as Qurtabi in his famous commentary says. It also may refer to both of them.

It is interesting that this group of misled people presented contradictory words. On one hand, they ridiculed the Prophet (S) and his call. They wanted to say that the claim of the Prophet (S) was so baseless that it did not deserve strict handling.

On the other hand, they believed that if they did not stick to the traditions and religion of their ancestors, it would be possible that the words of the holy Prophet (S) deviated them from it. This shows that they counted the Prophet’s words very effective, calculated, and serious. It is not impossible that those bewildered and obstinate people spoke so disturbingly.

Moreover, it has been seen many times that when deniers of the Truth confront divine leaders’ logic, they use mockery as a technique for belittling them while innerly they do not have such a belief. And sometimes they count it serious and struggle with it by their soul and body.

Therefore Allah, the Mighty, says in this noble verse:

“...therefore let those who go against His order beware lest a trial afflicts them or a painful punishment befalls them.”⁴

In another verse He says:

“This is guidance. And those who disbelieve in the revelations of their Lord, for them there is a painful doom of wrath.”⁵

Somewhere else He says:

“...and visited those who did wrong with dreadful punishment because they used to make mischief.”⁶

The Prophet (S) says:

“One who oppresses people more in this world, will be punished before Allah (s.w.t.) more severely and harshly than any other person on the day of Resurrection.”⁷

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 43

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا

43. “Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god? Would you then be a guardian over him?”

Any god other than Allah is called ‘Hawa’ (low desire).⁸

The main root of idol-worshipping is doing low desires, too.

Therefore, Allah says in this noble verse:

“Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god? Would you then be a guardian over him?”

It means that if they ridiculed, stood against, and denied the call of the Prophet (S), it was not because that his logic was weak, his reasons were not conceiving and his religion could not be doubted, but it was because they did not obey intellect and reason, and their god was their low desires. Then, would he expect that such persons accept his call, or that he can affect them?

Great commentators have cited various opinions about the sentence:

“Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god?”

Some say, as was mentioned in above, they have one idol and that idol is their low desires from which all their deeds originate.

However, some believe that they do not observe any logic in choosing idols, but whenever they see a piece of stone and an interesting tree or something that motivates their low desire, they select it as their god, bow down before it, make sacrifice for it, and ask it to solve their problems.

There is a narration in the occasion of revelation of this holy verse, which confirms this meaning: one year, in Mecca, it happened that Quraysh were in a tight corner and they scattered here and there.

As soon as some of them saw a beautiful tree or an interesting stone, they worshipped it and if it was stone, they named it ‘Stone of Happiness’. They made sacrifice for it and poured the blood of sacrifice on it. Even they asked it heal of their animals’ maladies.

One day an Arab came and wanted to rub his camels against that stone and so to be blessed. But the camels did stampede and scattered in the desert. Then he said a poem whose content is that I came to ‘Stone of Happiness’ to unify our dispersion, but it scattered our gathering.

Then he said that what this Stone of Happiness is. It is only a piece of stone of that land. It neither leads nor misleads man.

Another Arab saw one of these pieces of stone, while a fox was discharging urine on it, he said:

“Is it a god on which a fox discharges urine? Certainly the one on which foxes discharge urine is abject.”⁹

These two commentaries are consistent with each other.

The principle of idol-worshipping that is generated from some superstitions is a kind of worshipping low desires. Selecting various idols without any logic is also another branch of low desires.

Note

Undoubtedly there are various instincts and desires in man, all of which are necessary for continuance of his life: anger, fury, self-loving, being fond of wealth and earthy life, and such like. Certainly system of creation has created all of them for the sake of perfection.

What is important is that sometimes they do not cut their coat according to their cloth and exceed the limit. And they will be no longer the controlled means that are in the hand of mind and they begin to rebel and revolt. They imprison intellect and rule the whole entity of man and take him under their control.

This is the same thing that is called ‘worshipping low desires’ or ‘sensuality’, which is more dangerous than all kinds of idol-worshipping. Even idol-worshipping is also generated from it.

This is why the Prophet (S) has counted idol of low desire as the worst and supreme idol. He says:

“Under the sun and before Allah there is no greater idol than low desire that is worshipped.”¹⁰

There is another tradition that says:

“The most disliked idol that is worshipped in the earth is the idol of low desire.”

If we think well about this sentence, we find out that worshipping low desire is the source of unawareness and ignorance, as the holy Qur’an says:

“...and do not obey him whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance, and he follows his own low desire and whose affair has become all excess.”¹¹

On the other hand worshipping low desires (sensuality) is the source of paganism and faithlessness, as the holy Qur’an says:

“Therefore, let him who believes not in it and follows his own vain desires turn you away from it, lest you perish.”¹²

Moreover, worshipping low desires is the worst kind of misleading, as the holy Qur’an says:

“...And who goes farther astray than he who follows his lust without guidance from Allah...”¹³

Another matter is that worshipping low desires is the opposite of Truth-seeking and it deviates man from the path of Allah, as the Holy Qur'an says:

"...therefore judge between mankind with justice, and do not follow desire lest it should lead you astray from the way of Allah..." ¹⁴

Furthermore, worshipping low desires prevents justice and pursuit of fairness, as the holy Qur'an says:

"...therefore do not follow any passion so that, you can deal justly..." ¹⁵

Finally, if the system of heavens and the earth could be based on man's low desires, the entire universe would be corrupted:

"And if the Truth had followed their low desires, certainly the heavens and the earth and whoever therein would have perished!..." ¹⁶

In Islamic narrations we see some striking sentences about this matter, too.

Imam Ali (as) said:

"Miserable is he who is deceived by his own low desires and pride." ¹⁷

Imam Ali (as) said:

"Worshipping low desires is the enemy of intellect." ¹⁸

Imam Ali (as) said:

"Worshipping low desires is the source of pains." ¹⁹

Imam Ali (as) said:

"Neither religion nor intellect can be along with worshipping low desires." ²⁰

In brief, when worshipping of low desires rules, there is neither religion nor intellect but pain, disaster and misery.

There will be only wretchedness, corruption and barbarity there.

Phenomena of our life and bitter experiences that we have about others and ourselves are live evidence of all points that were mentioned about worshipping of low desires in above holy verses and narrations. We see persons who suffer the consequences of one hour of worshipping low desires until, the end of their life.

We see young people who, as a result of following their low desires, have become addicted to drugs and

have got sexually and morally deviated and so they have changed into a miserable worthless and disable creature. They have lost all their power and capitals.

In current age and past ages both, we see persons who slaughtered thousands and even millions of people out of their low desires and their shameful names will be remembered infamously up to the end of the world.

There is no exception to this principle. Even scientists and famous worshippers of Allah such as Bal'am Ba'ura who were stripped of humane magnificence because of following low desires, and the Holy Qur'an says about them: they are like a dog which pants in any case.²¹

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Prophet (S) and Amir-ul-Mu'minin Ali (as) said:

*"The most perilous precipice which is on the way of your happiness is worshipping low desires and ambitions, for following low desires prevents you from the truth and ambitions make man forget the Hereafter."*²²

What are said in narrations and verses about not paying attention to low desires also show the importance of this issue in the viewpoint of Islam: so far that it considers being in awe of Allah and standing against the low desires as the key of Paradise.

The Qur'an says:

"But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust, verily the Garden will be his abode."²³

Imam Ali (as) says:

*"The bravest person is one who overcomes his (or her) wishes."*²⁴

There are many stories that are mentioned about spiritual state of some great men and the friends of Allah, who because of abandoning the low desires achieved spiritually high ranks which can not be achieved by usual ways.

Surah al-Furqan – Verse 44

أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

44. "Do you think that most of them do hear or understand? They are (nothing) but like the cattle; nay they are farther astray from the path."

Criticizing pagans, the holy Qur'an uses the word 'Akhtar' (most) to differentiate those who will be guided from others.

The verse says:

“Do you think that most of them do hear or understand?...”

An animal has got no intellect to know goodness, badness, falsehood and truth, but deviated men act according to their low desires and do not follow intellect, although they have intellect.

To show the importance of the matter, this holy verse says:

“...They are (nothing) but like the cattle; nay, but they are farther astray from the path!”

Something like this meaning is mentioned in verse 179 of Surah Al-'Araf No. 7, which is about hell-dwellers who have got such a fate because of not using their eye, ear and intellect.

It says:

“...These are as the cattle, rather they are more astray...”

Though it is, in short, clear that they have gone astray, commentators have said interesting matters about this subject:

1. The reason that beasts can not know anything and do not have a heedful ear and a clear-sighted eye, is that they do not have such abilities, but man is more miserable than them, for he has been bestowed the essence of all talents. Allah has offered him so much talent that he can be His vicegerent on the earth, but he will reach a state that he will be reduced to the level of a beast.

He has wasted all his merits and is reduced from the rank of being prostrated by the angels down to the abject rank of evils. This is really painful and it is a clear misleading.

2. Beasts will somehow not be reckoned and will not be divinely punished, while misled men must take the burden of all their deeds on their shoulder and be punished without any reduction.

3. Beasts provide men many services and do various jobs, but mutinous and disobedient men provide no services and even so they cause many disasters and destructions.

4. Beasts do not pose anyone threat and if they do, it is limited. But arrogant, wistful, and faithless man begins a war in which millions of people are murdered.

5. If beasts do not have any program and law, they follow the path that creation has determined for their instincts and they go that way only. But obstinate and disobedient men respect neither laws of creation nor divine legislation and count their wishes and desires as the ruler of everything.

6. Beasts never justify their actions. If they do a wrong action, it is a wrong action and if they follow their own way, that they do, it is the natural way. But it happens many times that an arrogant, tyrannical and wistful man justifies all his crimes as though he has done his humane and divine duties!

Therefore, no creature is more dangerous and harmful than a wistful, disobedient, faithless man, and because of this such a man is named 'the worst of beasts' in Surah Al-'Anfal, No.8, verse 22. What a proper name! So man, who is the vicegerent of Allah, will be worse than beast if he neglects his nature.

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1. At-Tahqīq Fī Kalamīl-il-Qur'ān
 2. Kanz ud-Daqqīyiq, the Commentary
 3. Nūr-uth-Thaqalayn, the Commentary
 4. Surah An-Nūr, No. 24, verse 63
 5. Al-Jethiyah, No. 45, verse 11
 6. Al-'A'rāf, No. 7, verse 165
 7. Kanz ul-'Ummīl, Vol. 3, P. 500
 8. Qurtabī, the commentary
 9. Ali Ibn 'Ibrāhīm's commentary, according to Nūr uth-Thaqalayn Vol. 4, P. 20
 10. Dorr ul-Manthūr, following the concerning verse
 11. Surah Al-Kahf, No. 18, verse 28
 12. Surah Tā-Hī, No. 20, verse 16
 13. Surah Al-Qasas, No. 28, verse 50
 14. Surah Sād, No. 38, verse 26
 15. Surah An-Nisā', No. 4, verse 135
 16. Surah Al-Mu'minīn, No. 23, verse 71
 17. Nahj ul-Balāqah, Sermon 86
 18. Qurar ul-Hikam, 265
 19. Qurar ul-Hikam, 1048
 20. Qurar ul-Hikam, 10541
 21. Surah Al-'A'rāf, No. 7, verse 176
 22. Safīnat-ul-Bihār, Vol. 2, P. 728 and Nahj-ul-Balāqah, Sermon 38 and 42
 23. Surah An-Nazī'āt, No. 79, verses 40 and 41
 24. Safīnat ul-Bihār, Vol. 1, P. 689

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