

Surah al-Ghafir, Verses 64 – 85

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 64

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَصَوَّرَكُمُ فَأَحْسَنَ صُورَكُمْ
وَرَزَقَكُمُ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمُ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

64. Allah, it is He Who has made for you the earth as a dwelling place and the sky as a canopy, and has given you shape and made your shapes good and has provided you with good things. That is Allah, your Lord: so Bountiful and Exalted is Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

The earth as a serene dwelling place, fashioning the sky, creation of man, and providing him with blessings are all for fostering him as his good shape and pure provision and sustenance are manifestations of Divine Lordship.

The blessed Verse in question resumes the discussion on Divine Favors bestowed upon servants so as to accord them further knowledge and hope in whose light they may invoke God Almighty and their prayers be answered.

It is worthy of note that the preceding Verses treated of temporal bounties, i.e. night and day, and the blessed Verse in question deals with spatial Bounties, e.g. the earth as a dwelling place and the elevated canopy of the sky, saying:

“Allah, it is He Who has made for you the earth as a dwelling place.”

God Almighty created all the prerequisites for the establishment of a secure and serene dwelling place, free from quaking, harmonious with human physical and psychological aspects, and abounding in many Bounties encompassing all human needs.

The blessed Verse further adds:

“and the sky as a canopy.”

The word bana', according to Ibn Mansur's Lisan al-'Arab, is applied to tents and canopies and the like used by Bedouin.

The sky is interestingly depicted as a canopy surrounding the earth. It is worthy of note that the word sky indicates the atmosphere surrounding the earth like a canopy.

This great Divine canopy serves as a means of protection against severe sun shine without which the rays of the sun and the fatal rays of galaxies would have perished all living beings on the face of the earth.

It is for the same reason that astronauts have to constantly wear specially heavy and valuable clothes to protect them against such rays.

Furthermore, the “canopy” protects the earth from meteors constantly absorbed toward the earth and burns them at the outset of entering the atmosphere due to their velocity and pressure so that their ashes calmly subside on the earth.

The same idea is attested elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an1:

“And We have made the heaven a roof, safe and well guarded.”

The blessed Verse proceeds from physical to spiritual issues:

“[He is the One Who] has given you shape and made your shapes good.”

With his erect, well built body, and beautiful visage, man is superior to other living beings and he is thus able to perform all kinds of delicate or heavy tasks and live conveniently and enjoy the bounties of life. Contrary to most of animals that use their mouths nozzles to eat and drink, man uses his hands to select healthy food, peel fruits, and dispense with useless pieces.

A number of Qur'anic exegets interpret

sura (literally “visage, face”)

herein in the sense of outward and inward aspects designating faculties and tastes created by God Almighty in man through which he is superior to all living beings.

The fourth and the last Bounty mentioned in the blessed Verse is that God Almighty

“has provided you with good things.”

The word tayyibat is of broad semantic range encompassing any good and pure thing, e.g. food, clothes, spouses, homes, mounts, and even good words and conversations. Man may render such bounties impure through ignorance, but God Almighty has created them pure.

Following an enumeration of these four great Bounties, which are two by two granted to the sky and the earth and man, the blessed Verse says:

“That is Allah, your Lord: so Bountiful and Exalted is Allah, the Lord of the worlds.”

The Bestower of all these bounties upon mankind is the Creator of the world of existence and He is worthy to be worshipped for His Lordship.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 65

هُوَ الْحَيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

65. He is the Ever-Living, there is no god but Allah. Therefore, invoke Him, having made your worship pure for Him Alone. All the praises and thanks are to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

Real existence belongs to God but the existence of other beings is limited, transient, and contingent. The blessed Verse treats of knowing God Almighty and invoking and worshipping Him.

The question of the Unity of worshipping God Almighty proceeds from a different course in this Verse which is acknowledgement of existence in the real sense of the word as belonging to Him Alone, saying:

“He is the Ever-Living,”

since His Existence springs from His Own Essence Which is Independent of other beings and Immortal. It is solely God Almighty Who possesses such Attributes and all living beings besides Him lead a limited and transient life which springs from Divine Essence.

The object of worship is supposed to be Ever-Living as:

“There is no god but Allah. Therefore, invoke Him, having made your worship pure for Him Alone.”

Man is supposed to leave aside all beings besides God Almighty, since they are transient and constantly change in the course of their life.

“You are not subject to alteration. You are the only Being Who has not died and shall not die.”

The blessed Verse closes thus:

“All the praises and thanks are to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.”

The statement is actually an admonition to Allah’s servants who glorify and praise Him for the Bounties mentioned in the preceding Verses, the Bounties encompassing all human existence, particularly that of life.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 66

قُلْ إِنِّي نُهَيْتُ أَنْ أُعْبَدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَمَّا جَاءَنِي الْبَيِّنَاتُ مِنْ رَبِّي
وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أُسَلِّمَ لِلرَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

66. Say: “I have been forbidden to worship those whom you worship besides Allah, since there have come to me Signs from my Lord and I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds.

Believers may not suffice to believe in Allah in their hearts, but they are supposed to express their belief. Association with Allah’s friends and dissociation from His enemies should accompany each other. Having not warded all kinds of polytheism and disbelief, we may not be monotheists in the real sense of the word.

The blessed Verse in question makes a conclusion of the foregoing discussions on Divine Unity and so as to render polytheists and idolaters desperate, the Noble Prophet of Islam (S) is thus addressed:

“I have been forbidden to worship those whom you worship besides Allah, since there have come to me Signs from my Lord and I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds.”

The blessed Verse impedes man from idolatry and produces manifest, sensible, intellectual, and narrational arguments which have come to him from his Lord.

It is also an injunction as to submission against

“the Lord of the worlds”

which presents a sufficient argument for total submission against His Pure Essence.

It is worthy of note that injunction (amr) and prohibition (nahy) are distinct in this Verse, injunction toward total submission before God Almighty and prohibition from idolatry.

The reason lying behind the distinction may lie in the fact that in terms of worshipping idols, man worships what he is prohibited from it, but in terms of worshipping God Almighty, man, besides

worshipping Him, is supposed to submit to His Commands.

It is attested elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an2:

“Say: ‘Indeed I am commanded to worship Allah by obeying Him and doing religious deeds sincerely for His sake only. And I am commanded [this] in order that I may be the first of those who submit themselves to Allah as Muslims.’”

It is worthy of note that the Verse is saying that I have received injunctions and prohibitions, namely you are supposed to take care of yourselves without provoking their sense of obduracy.

The last word about the preceding Verses is that the Divine Attribute:

“Lord of the worlds”

is reiterated in three consecutive Verses:

“So Bountiful and Exalted is Allah, the Lord of the worlds,”

“All the praises and thanks are to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,”

“I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds.”

The logical sequence is evident: Divine Immortality and Bountifulness; all praises and thanks are devoted to His Pure Essence; His Sacred Essence as the only Object of worship.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 67

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلاً ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ثُمَّ لِتَكُونُوا شُيُوخًا وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يَتَوَفَّى مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا أَجْلاً مُّسَمًّى وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

67. It is He Who has created you from dust, then from semen, then from a clot, then brings you forth as an infant [from womb], then [makes you grow] to reach the age of full strength, and afterwards to be old, though some among you die before [you reach an advanced age, but some of you live and] reach an appointed term in order that you may understand.

Man is created from clay rather than from animals through evolution. It is Divine Omnipotence that makes the reasoning and thinking man from inanimate clay. The best subject of intellection is man's creation whose death does not lead to his perdition but it is taking his soul from his body.

Thus the blessed Verse in question says:

“It is He Who has created you from dust, then from semen, then from a clot, then brings you forth as an infant [from womb], then [makes you grow] to reach the age of full strength, and afterwards to be old, though some among you die before [you reach an advanced age, but some of you live and] reach an appointed term in order that you may understand.”

Therefore, the first stage is man’s creation from clay, since all nutrient elements constituting man and his semen stem from clay. The next stage is that of semen which concerns all men but Adam and his wife, Eve.

The third stage is the one in which semen has evolved into a clot. The fourth stage is that of mudgha (“small chunk of chewed flesh”) in which organs begin to develop and it is the stage of sense and movement. The Holy Qur’an does not make mention of these three stages herein but it is mentioned elsewhere in It.

The fourth stage is mentioned herein as that of the birth of the embryo. The fifth stage is that of development of physical strength maintained by some as the age of thirty in which physical strength reaches its zenith, though some have considered it earlier or later than thirty years of age; however it is different in different people.

The mentioned age is termed as:

“utmost growth or maturity” (bulugh ashadd)

in the Holy Qur’an. After the age of thirty, faculties begin to regress. The sixth stage is old age which comes in time. Finally, the last stage arrives which is the end of life and man is taken to his immortal dwelling place.

Taking some many expressions, systematic and well measured developments there remains no room for doubts as to the Omnipotence and Glory of the Origin of the world of existence and His Bounties and Favors.

It is worthy of note that the clause:

“He created you” (khalaqakum)

is employed with regard to the first four stages concerning man’s creation from clay, semen, clot, and the birth of the infant in which no role is stipulated for man; however, the three stages following birth, i.e. the stage of attaining to the zenith of physical strength, old age, and the end of life, the clauses:

“that you reach” (li-tablughu)

and

“that you be” (li-takunu)

are employed which refer to man's existential independence following birth and probably to the fact that the three stages may be attained earlier or later owing to man's prudence or imprudence; in other words, man may cause his early old age or early death mentioning which makes a reference to Qur'anic precise expressions.

The verbal form:

yutawaffa (“*you die*”)

referring to death indicates that within the context of Qur'anic Verses, death is not equal to perdition, but angels of death take human soul to the other world.

This recurrent Qur'anic motif explicitly reveals the Islamic attitude toward death thus totally stripping death of the material concept which is perdition and non-existence and considers it as a gate to the world of immortality.

The clause:

“some among you die before [you reach an advanced age]”

may either refer to the period of life prior to death or to all the preceding stages in which man may come to the end of his life.

It is also worthy of note that all these stages are intertwined with

“then” (thumma)

indicating consecutiveness with interludes except the last stage which is the end of life connected with

“and” (wa).

This different expression may demonstrate that reaching the end of life does not necessarily occur following attaining to an old age, since:

“many a youth died before reaching advanced years”

and even some children or young adults die before reaching youth.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 68

هُوَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ فَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

68. It is He Who gives life and causes death. And when He decides upon a thing He says to it only: "Be!" and it is.

It is solely God Almighty Who gives life and causes death. He is omnipotent and nothing lies beyond His Omnipotence. His Will is inevitable and irresistible.

The blessed Verse treats of the most significant manifestations of Divine Omnipotence which is the question of life and death. Despite scientific advancement, the two phenomena are still dilemmas. Life and death in the broader sense of the words as applicable to plants, animals, and human beings in diverse forms are within Divine Omnipotence.

It is worthy of note that living beings, from monocellular to gigantic beings living in the dark depths of oceans to the birds soaring in the sky, to planktons, to trees whose heights reach tens of meters each have a particular type of life and circumstances. It is in the same vein that they differ in the manner of death.

Forms of life are indubitably the most diverse and the most wondrous forms of the world of creation, particularly coming from the inanimate into the animate world and vice versa are one of the most amazing manifestations of Divine Omnipotence.

It is needless to say that none of these intricate and significant issues constitutes any difficulty before Him and they come into being so long as He commands them to do likewise.

Therefore, the blessed Verse thus closes:

"And when He decides upon a thing He says to it only: 'Be!' and it is."

The employment of

"Be"

and

"and it is"

indicates the incompetence of words in conveying meaning, otherwise there would be no need to such words since Divine Will directly leads to the creation of the being.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verses 69 – 70

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ أَنَّى يُصْرَفُونَ

الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِالْكِتَابِ وَمِمَّا أُرْسِلْنَا بِهِ رَسُولَنَا فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ

69. See you not those who dispute about the Ayat (Verses, Signs) of Allah? How are they turning away [from Truth]?

70. Those who deny the Book and that with which We sent Our Messenger, they will come to know [the consequences of their acts].

Familiarity with the history of ancient obdurate peoples provides modern peoples with lessons and peace of mind. Disputing about Qur'anic is on a par with going astray; that is why warning could be quite fruitful in propagation.

The blessed Verse in question treats of those who dispute about Divine Ayat and deny the arguments and Calls of Messengers. The fate of such people is vividly depicted in these Verses.

Verse 69 opens thus:

“See you not those who dispute about the Ayat (Verses, Signs) of Allah? How are they turning away [from Truth]?”

such disputes are accompanied by obduracy and enmity and these blind imitations and unfounded biases lead them astray, since Truth manifests itself solely through the spirit of truth-seeking.

The rhetorical question addressed to the Noble Prophet (S) indicates that taking into account their state, any impartial person wonders at their error and asks himself:

“what do they not see the truth despite the availability of so many clear Signs and Verses?”

Verse 70 adds:

“Those who deny the Book and that with which We sent Our Messenger.”

It is worthy of note that the clause:

“those who dispute about the Ayat (Verses, Signs) of Allah”

is attested thrice in the Chapter in question³ and the contextual meaning indicates that the Ayat of Allah refers to the Signs of Prophethood and the contents of the Scriptures.

Since the Signs of Divine Unity and the issues concerning Resurrection were included in Scriptures, they were also subject to disputes. Does the reiteration lays emphasis on this significant topic or some other issue were intended by the same?

The latter sounds more viable, since each of the here Verses treat of some specific topic. Verse 56 deals

with the incentives of such disputes, namely vanity and arrogance, whereas Verse 35 discusses their worldly chastisement which is sealing up their hearts by God Almighty.

The blessed Verse in question⁴ treats of their otherworldly chastisement and kinds of torments to be inflicted on them in Hell.

It is also noteworthy that the verbal form:

yujadilun (“*they dispute*”)

is in the present tense and indicates progression. It is a reference to those who deny Divine Signs and verses so as to justify their vicious false beliefs and vicious deeds and preoccupy themselves with baseless disputes.

Thus they are warned at the close of the Verse:

“[*Soon*] *they will come to know [the consequences of their acts].*”

Surah al-Ghafir – Verses 71 – 72

إِذِ الْأَغْلَالُ فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ وَالسَّلَاسِلُ يُسْحَبُونَ

فِي الْحَمِيمِ ثُمَّ فِي النَّارِ يُسْجَرُونَ

71. When iron collars will be rounded over their necks and the chains they shall be dragged along,

72. In the boiling water, then they will be burned in the Fire.

The word **aghlal** is the plural form of ghull indicating “iron collar” as a token of debasement and denigration.

Salasil is the pluralized form of silsila (“chain”) and the verbal forms **yusbahun** and **yusjarun** designate “they are dragged along” and “they are burned” respectively. Depiction of Resurrection and the diverse kinds of torments as reflected in Divine Revelation warns and fosters man and creates the fear of God in him.

Thus the two blessed Verses in question say:

“When iron collars will be rounded over their necks and the chains they shall be dragged along in

the boiling water, then they will be burned in the Fire.”

Some Qur’anic exegetes maintain that they are filled with fire, though the two meanings are not inconsistent. The torment is actually a reaction against the deeds of those who obdurately and arrogantly disputed about Divine Ayat and denied them out of vanity and ignorance.

Thus, they entangle themselves in the chains of blind imitations and biases and on that Day, they will be fettered with iron collars and shackles with utmost humility. They will be dragged along in boiling water and they will turn into kindling in Hell.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verses 73 – 74

ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تُشْرِكُونَ

مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا بَلْ لَمْ نَكُنْ نَدْعُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ شَيْئًا كَذَلِكَ يَضِلُّ اللَّهُ
الْكَافِرِينَ

73. Then it will be said to them: “Where are [all] those whom you used to associate in worship as partners

74. Besides Allah?” They will say: “They have vanished from us [then thus they will lie]: Nay, we did not invoke anything before.” Thus Allah leads astray the disbelievers.

The Day of Resurrection is the day of manifestation of truths and fruitlessness of polytheism. The blessed Verses are saying that besides inflicting physical torments upon them, they shall suffer from psychological excruciating torments.

“Where are [all] those whom you used to associate in worship as partners Besides Allah”

so that they may intercede on your behalf and save you from such painful torments and the blazing Hellfire? Now, where are they to intercede on your behalf?

Bowing their heads in shame, they will reply:

“They have vanished from us and perished such that we know nothing of them.”

As reflected elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an, these false objects of worship are indubitably in Hell and most probably they are beside their former worshippers, but since they are ineffective, it seems as if they are deaf and blind!

Then they notice that their former confession to their praiseworthiness is a stigma of disgrace on them; as a consequence of which they deny their praiseworthiness, saying:

“Nay, we did not invoke anything before.”

They try to say that they were not but illusions, like a mirage in the desert of life that we regarded as real springheads; however they now know that they were names devoid of meaning whose worship was solely vanity and error. Thus they express an indubitable reality.

Another possible interpretation is that they try to tell lies, assuming that they may deliver themselves from disgrace and shame through lying, as reflected elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an5:

“there will then be [left] no excuses for them but to say: ‘By Allah, our Lord, we were not those who joined others in worship with Allah.’ Behold! How they lie against themselves! But the [lie] which they invented will disappear from them.”

Thus Verse 74 closes:

“Thus Allah leads astray the disbelievers.”

Their disbelief and obduracy serve as veils covering their hearts and thought, as a consequence of which they deviate from the Straight Path and go astray. On the Day of Resurrection, they shall be deprived of Paradise and shall enter Hell. Thus God Almighty leads disbelievers astray.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verses 75 – 76

ذَلِكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَفْرَحُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا كُنْتُمْ تَمْرَحُونَ

ادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا فَبِئْسَ مَثْوَى الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ

75. That [torment] was because you had been exulting in the earth without any right and that you used to rejoice extremely [in your error].

76. Enter the gates of Hell to abide therein and what an evil abode of the arrogant!

The Islamic faith is in man’s natural and primordial disposition (fitra). It is not against happiness which is in man’s original nature. It is only inappropriate exultations which are subject to criticism a number of whose instances are reflected in the Holy Qur’an.

The blessed Verse 75 says:

“That [torment] was because you had been exulting in the earth without any right and that you used to rejoice extremely [in your error].”

They rejoiced in denying the Prophets, slaying believers, and suppressing the deprived and the weak. They were falsely proud of committing sins and breaking the law. Now they have to meet the consequences of such improper exultation, arrogance, negligence, and concupiscence in shackles and fetters and amid blazing flames of Hellfire.

The verbal form ***tafrahun*** derives from f–r–h (“exult, rejoice”) which may be employed in an ameliorative sense, as in 30:4–5:

“And on that Day, the believers will rejoice [the people of the Book against the Magians] with the help of Allah,”

or a pejorative one, as reflected in the story of Korah⁶:

“Remember when his people said to him: ‘Do not exult in vain, since Allah likes not those who exult vainly.’”

The difference between the two connotations should be distinguished and it is evident that it is employed pejoratively in the blessed Verse in question.

The verbal form ***tamrahun*** derives from m–r–h and according to a number of Qur’anic exegetes and lexicographers it designates

“rejoice excessively.”

Some maintain that the word connotes rejoice in vain but some others hold that it implies rejoicing by making use of Divine Bounties in vain.

These senses apparently refer to the same signification, since excessive rejoicing leads to error and is accompanied by sins, impurities, and concupiscent desires.

Such vain exultations imbued with arrogance, neglect, vanity, and concupiscent desires lead man astray in the twinkling of an eye and impede him from comprehending the truth. Such attitude renders realities facetious and truths, vain. The fate reflected in the preceding Verses is in store for such people.

Verse 76 is addressed to the people condemned to torment who are being asked to

“enter the gates of Hell to abide therein and what an evil abode of the arrogant!”

The Verse is a further emphasis on the fact that misfortunes stem from vanity and arrogance, serving as

the origin of all evils, a veil before the truth seeking eyes of man, resistance to Messengers, and persistence in error.

Again, we come across

“the gates”

of Hell in the blessed Verse in question. Does entering the gates of Hell indicate that each group enters a specific gate?

Or a group enters different gates? It may imply that there are different gates and levels in Hell, in the manner of terrible prisons with labyrinthine corridors with many cells, and a number of those who were obdurately in error have to descend all these levels and find their everlasting abode on the lowest level at the depth of Hell!

In this vein, a tradition is narrated from the Commander of the Faithful, Imam ‘Ali (as) as the interpretation of a Qur’anic Verse⁷:

“It [Hell] has seven gates, for each of those gates is a [specific] group [of sinners] assigned,”

saying:

“Hell has seven gates. It has seven levels on top of each other.”

Then, he laid one hand on the other, saying:

*“Like this!”*⁸

There is another interpretation according to which the gates of Hell, like those of Paradise, refer to different factors leading man to Hell or Paradise, e.g. sins and good righteous deeds, as reflected in Islamic traditions. The number seven indicates multiplicity rather than number. It is worthy of note that the eight gates of Paradise designate that Bounties exceed torments.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 77

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَأِمَّا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ الَّذِي نَعِدُهُمْ أَوْ نَتَوَفَّيَنَّكَ فَإِنَّا
يُرْجَعُونَ

77. Therefore, [O Prophet] be patient! Indeed the Promise of Allah is true and whether We show you some part of what We have promised them or We cause you to die [before that] then [in any case] still it is to Us they all shall be returned.

The Veracity of Divine Promises is the source of patience and serenity, since Divine Acts occur timely.

Resuming the foregoing discussions on disbelievers' impediments and their arrogance and vanity and denial of Divine Verses and Signs, the Noble Prophet (S) is thus consoled:

“Therefore, [O Prophet] be patient! Indeed the Promise of Allah is true.”

In other words, the Promise of victory to the Noble Prophet (S) and the Warning against the excruciating chastisement of the arrogant are both true and shall be indubitably fulfilled.

In order to hinder the enemies of Truth from conceiving that any delay in their chastisement may deliver them from Divine chastisement, the Verse further adds:

“If we show you some part of what We have promised them or We cause you to die [prior to their entanglement with torments] then still [it does not matter, since] it is to Us they all shall be returned [and We shall fulfill Our Promises].”

The Noble Prophet's (S) obligation was to clearly declare his Call and impart the Truth to all people such that the hearts of the awakened people may be enlightened through your propagation of the Islamic faith and there remains no room for the opponents of the true faith.

The Noble Prophet (S) was merely asked to attend to the fulfillment of his obligation without feeling sympathy for the affliction of the obdurate disbelievers with Divine torments. The Verse is evidently a clear warning against them so they know that they shall be entangled with Divine torment in the Hereafter as some of them met their dire ends on the battlefield of Badr.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 78

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ لَمْ نَقْصُصْ
عَلَيْكَ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قُضِيَ بِالْحَقِّ
وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

78. And verily We have sent Messengers before you of some of them We have related to you their story. And of some We have not related to you their story and it was not given to any Messenger that he should bring a sign except by the Leave of Allah. But, when comes the Commandment of Allah [the Day of Resurrection], the matter will be decided with truth and the followers of falsehood will then be at loss.

One of the means of education and guidance, made use of many a time in the Holy Qur'an, is to narrate

the history of the ancients and good models. The Day of Resurrection is the Day of Divine Judgment and the disgrace of the followers of falsehood.

To further console the Noble Prophet (S), the blessed Verse in question makes a reference to the Prophets of ancient peoples who were entangled with such difficulties but pursued the propagation of their teachings despite the impediments; as a consequence of which they became victorious:

“And verily We have sent Messengers before you of some of them We have related to you their story. And of some We have not related to you their story”

each of whom faced such intolerable vicissitudes and many a vain and obdurate disbeliever; nevertheless, finally Truth prevailed and wrong doers and sinners were vanquished.

Since obdurate and querulous polytheists and disbelievers asked Messengers to show unto them their miracles at all times and the polytheists contemporaneous with the Prophet of Islam (S) requested the same, the blessed Verse in question further adds:

“And it was not given to any Messenger that he should bring a sign except by the Leave of Allah.”

All miracles are wrought by Divine Will rather than by disbelievers' requests who consider them to be playthings.

Thus, the Noble Prophet (S) may not accept their requested miracles; rather God Almighty made evident unto people what was required for public guidance at the hands of Prophets.

The blessed Verse addresses with a serious and warning tone the disbelievers who said unto the Noble Prophet (S) that had he been right, how come that Divine torment would not have been sent unto them.

Thus the blessed Verse warns them:

“But, when comes the Commandment of Allah [the Day of Resurrection], the matter will be decided with truth and the followers of falsehood will then be at loss.”

On that Day, no repentance shall be accepted and all the ways of returning to Allah shall be obstructed. Moans and cries shall be of no avail.

It is on that Day that the followers of falsehood shall clearly perceive that they have missed their opportunities without accruing any righteous good deeds, rather they have been entangled with Divine Wrath and excruciating torments.

Why then do they ask for the coming of that irreversible Day? As per this interpretation, the blessed Verse in question makes a reference to the torment of desperateness.

However, some Qur'anic exegetes maintain that the blessed Verse refers to the Divine Command of

inflicting torments upon wrong doers on the Day of Resurrection. It shall be on that Day that the deeds of all men shall be judged with truth and the followers of falsehood shall be apprised of their total loss.

The interpretation is substantiated by another Qur'anic Verse9:

“And on the Day that the Hour will be established, on that Day the followers of falsehood shall lose [everything].”

Phrases like:

“Divine Decree”

are applied to the torment in this world in numerous Qur'anic Verses10. The Verse may be of a broader semantic range to encompass the torments in this world and the Hereafter. It is worthy of note that the total loss of the followers of falsehood become evident in both.

It is also noteworthy that according to a number of narrations there was a clown in Medina who make people laugh and at times said that Imam Sajjad 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (as) had irritated him since he had not been successful in making him laugh.

Thus, one day the Imam (as) was passing by and the clown took away his aba ('aba'), but the Noble Imam (as) did not take any heed of him. The Imam's companions followed the clown and restored the cloak. Imam (as) inquired them about his identity.

They replied:

“He is a clown who makes Medinans laugh.”

The Noble Imam (as) asked them to say unto him:

“There shall be a Day on which followers of falsehood shall be at loss.”

Surah al-Ghafir – Verses 79 – 81

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَنْعَامَ لِتَرْكَبُوا مِنْهَا وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ

وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا عَلَيْهَا حَاجَةً فِي صُدُورِكُمْ وَعَلَيْهَا وَعَلَى الْفُلْكِ تُحْمَلُونَ

وَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ فَأَيَّ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ تُنْكِرُونَ

79. Allah it is He Who has made quadrupeds for you that you may ride on some of them and of some you eat.

80. And you have benefits from them and that you may reach by their means a desire that is in your breasts and on them and on ships you are carried.

81. And He shows you His Ayat [i.e., Signs and Verses, at all times]. Which then of the Ayat of Allah do you deny?

Taking heed of Divine Bounties is the best means of development and reinforcement of knowledge and gratitude. In this vein, attending to those Bounties which may be perceived and used by all people at any time and any place is the best way.

Thus, these Verses refer to the Signs of Divine Omnipotence and His All-Embracing Bounties and reveal some of them so that people may be further acquainted with His Glory and thereby arouse the sense of gratitude as a means of knowing God Almighty in them.

The blessed Verse reads:

“Allah it is He Who has made quadrupeds for you that you may ride on some of them and of some you eat.”

Some cattle, e.g. sheep, are used for their meat and some larger ones are used as mounts as well, e.g. camel which is the ship of parched deserts and is also used for its meat.

The Arabic word *an'am* (plural form of *na'am*) was originally employed in the sense of camel but its semantic range further developed to include camel, cow, and sheep. The word is a cognate of *ni'ma* (“delight”), since cattle are among the delights of man.

Even today, despite the availability of vehicles used on the land and in the air, at times men have solely to make use of cattle for crossing sandy deserts and narrow mountainous passageways.

The creation of diverse quadrupeds, particularly owing to their domesticability, is at times stronger than the most powerful men serve as Great Signs of God Almighty. There are small beasts of prey which are dangerous for men, but at times, a child may lead a file of enormous camels and

“he may take them where ever he wishes!”

Besides, man makes many other uses of them as reflected in Verse 80:

“And you have benefits from them.”

Man makes use of them for their milk, fleece, hair, hide, and even their feces as fertilizer. In short, there is nothing useless in cattle; even some drugs are made from them.

The blessed Verse proceeds to add that there was another reason for their creation:

“that you may reach by their means a desire that is in your breasts.”

A number of Qur’anic exegetes maintain that the Verse makes a reference to the transportation of consignments with quadrupeds as reflected in the preceding clauses, but

“a desire that is in your breasts”

may also indicate personal uses, such as making use of them for the purposes of recreation, emigration, travel, races, gaining prestige, and the like.

Since they are all used for traveling on the land, the Verse closes thus:

“on them and on ships you are carried.”

The employment of the phrase

“on them” (‘alayha)

whose antecedent is

“quadrupeds”

precedes

“ships” (fulk)

indicates that God Almighty provided men with means of transportation in deserts and seas so that they may reach their destinations conveniently. God Almighty created a quality in ships that despite their heaviness, they stay afloat. He set order in the flow of winds such that they may be used for sailing and “visiting friends.”

Verse 81 lays further emphasis on Divine Bounties and asks mankind to bear testimony to them:

“And He shows you His Ayat [i.e., Signs and Verses, at all times]. Which then of the Ayat of Allah do you deny?”

Neither His physical nor His non-physical Signs, e.g. man’s creation out of clay, developments of embryo and fetus, the stages of development following birth, and His Signs concerning life and death, are undeniable. Divine Signs and Manifestations are visible everywhere, but despite such undeniable evidence, some men deny them.

The eminent Qur'anic exeget, Tabarsi, maintains that such denial may spring from the following:

1. Following concupiscent desires leads man to make attempts at concealing the Truth with unfounded doubts and act upon his vain desires since acknowledgement of the Truth restricts him through obligations. However, despite evident arguments, they fail to acknowledge such obligations and deny the Truth.
2. Blind imitation of others, particularly their ancestors, thus making attempts at concealing the Truth.
3. False biases and beliefs of their predecessors which have penetrated their minds and impede impartial investigation of Divine Signs; as a consequence of which they fail to perceive them.

Surah al-Ghafir - Verse 82

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوا أَكْثَرَ
مِنْهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَا أُغْنَى عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

82. Have they not traveled through the land and seen what was the end of those before them [and the manner of their perdition]? They were more in number than them and mightier in strength and in traces in the land; yet all that they used to earn availed them not.

One of the Qur'anic criticisms is failing to travel so as to acquire knowledge and experience.

Disbelievers' opposition against the Noble Prophet (S) stemmed from their vanity for their large number and might.

Thus, the Holy Qur'an says that God Almighty destroyed those mightier than them and one of the reasons lying behind the fall of civilizations is opposition against Prophets and turning away from Divine Commands.

Following the expression of Divine Omnipotence and reminding mankind of His Bounties, Prudence, and the orderly system of creation, the blessed Verse in question proceeds to warn disbelievers and remind them that those who deny Divine Signs and Verses and the Noble Prophet (S) should travel through the land and see the manner of their predecessors.

The blessed Verse reveals that the ruins of the cities of 'Ad and Thamud were still visible at the time of the Revelation of the blessed Verse, since it is encouraged herein to travel and see them and perceive that those people who were superior to them in terms of might, valiance, and number failed to resist Divine Wrath and were entangled with torment.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verses 83 – 84

فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَرِحُوا بِمَا عِنْدَهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ
يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ وَكَفَرْنَا بِمَا كُنَّا بِهِ مُشْرِكِينَ

83. Then when their Messengers came to them with clear miracles, they were glad with that which they had of the knowledge [failing to acknowledge Prophets' logical arguments] and that [Divine Wrath] at which they used to mock, surrounded them.

84. Therefore, when they saw Our chastisement, they said: "We believe in Allah Alone and reject that we used to associate with Him as partners.

Divine appointment of Prophets to provide mankind with decisive arguments as to Divine Unity is one of Divine Acts.

It is worthy of note that human sciences and experiments may not substitute Divine teachings and render man needless of Prophets, since being arrogant of one's knowledge leads to derision of Divine Promises.

There have been people in human history who owing to the sciences which have led to the development of civilizations and accruing worldly possessions or due to their knowledge concerning their ancestors or other peoples imagine that they are needless of Divine Revelation and Prophetic teachings.

Men with small capacities, upon acquisition of limited knowledge or attainment to credentials and positions become arrogant.

According to the Holy Qur'an, there are three types of knowledge:

1. Fruitful knowledge which leads to human spiritual growth, as when Moses (as) said unto Khidr:

"May I follow you so that you teach me something of that knowledge which may lead to my [spiritual] growth"¹¹.

2. Fruitless knowledge such as knowledge as to the precise number of the people of the Cave:

"[Some] say that they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; and [others] say they were five, the dog being the sixth, guessing at the unseen; [yet others] say they were seven and

the dog being the eighth. Say [O Muhammad]: ‘My Lord knows best their number; none knows them but a few.’ So debate not [about their number] except with the clear proof [which We have revealed to you], nor consult any of them about the people of the Cave”¹².

3. Harmful knowledge, e.g. magic and sorcery for separating men from women.

It is said in Verse 83:

“Then when their Messengers came to them with clear miracles.”

The antecedent of the pronoun is apparently the disbelievers entangled with torment the ruins of whose cities were still visible at the time of Revelation of the blessed Verse.

The Verse is saying that such people denied Divinely appointed Messengers and regarded their teachings as false tales. In fact, it was not their knowledge, but absolute ignorance since they were deprived of true knowledge which could lead to their deliverance from error.

They considered their apparent knowledge to be the true one:

(“They know solely the outside appearance of the life of the world and they are heedless of the Hereafter,”¹³).

It is mentioned elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an that

“this is their utmost knowledge,”

i.e. their knowledge is limited to the affairs of this world rather than to those of the Hereafter. They imagined that they possessed knowledge, rejoiced at it, and derided Messengers; as a consequence of which they were surrounded with Divine torment.

According to Verse 84:

“Therefore, when they saw Our chastisement, they said: ‘We believe in Allah Alone and reject that we used to associate with Him as partners.’”

Nevertheless, upon tasting Divine chastisement, their repentance shall be of no avail, since they may not be provided with the opportunity to compensate for their vicious deeds and they are condemned by Allah Almighty to torment in Hell.

Surah al-Ghafir – Verse 85

فَلَمْ يَكُ يَنْفَعُهُمْ إِيمَانُهُمْ لَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا سُنَّتَ اللَّهُ الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ فِي عِبَادِهِ وَخَسِرَ

هُنَالِكَ الْكَافِرُونَ

85. Then their Faith could not avail them when they saw Our chastisement. This has been the way of Allah in dealing with His servants. And there the disbelievers shall be utterly at loss.

Unexpected happenings and emergencies flourish man's original disposition and reminds disbelievers to embrace faith; however, converting to belief in Divine Unity is supposed to be out of free choice rather than obligation and desperateness.

It is Divine tradition that forced belief is of not avail. Divine tradition refers to what God Almighty made prevalent among His servants.

It is for the same reason that repentance after tasting Divine torment shall not be accepted by God Almighty thereby:

“disbelievers shall be at utterly at loss.”

According the blessed Verse in question, the laws and the system of creation are such that they come to their end upon death, since when man comes to the end of his life, whatever potential perfection he has comes to its end as a consequence of which his repentance shall not be accepted.

It would be of interest to make mention of two traditions at the end of the exegesis of the Chapter in question. According to the first tradition, a Christian man fornicated with a Muslim woman at the time of Mutawakkil, the 'Abbasid Caliph. He converted before being chastised.

Yahya ibn Aktham said:

“His conversion to the Islamic faith solved the problem and there is no need to chastise him.”

A dispute arose between them concerning the same issue. Mutawakkil wrote a letter to Imam Hadi (as) and inquired about his opinion.

The Noble Imam (as) replied:

“Whenever a disbeliever violates a Muslim woman, he should be killed.”

A number of Muslim scholars found fault with his opinion saying that it was unprecedented in the Holy Qur'an and traditions (sunna).

Imam (as) referred to the Verse in question¹⁴ and replied:

“Since the man is a Christian and he has converted to Islam at the time of chastisement, his conversion is of no avail and he has to be chastised.”¹⁵

The other tradition is narrated from Imam Rida (as) on the authority of Ibn Babiwayh as per which, the noble Imam (as) is asked:

“Why did God Almighty drowned Pharaoh when he believed in Divine Unity?”

the Imam (as) replied:

“He believed when he tasted Divine torment, and such belief shall not be accepted.”

Then He alluded to the blessed Verse in question. 16

-
1. 21:32
 2. 39:11-12
 3. 35, 56, 70
 4. 70
 5. 6:23-24
 6. 28:76
 7. 15:44
 8. Majma' al-Bayan, vols. 5-6, p. 338 (under 15:44); Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 8, p. 289.
 9. 45:27
 10. e.g. 11:43, 76, 101
 11. 18:66
 12. 18:22
 13. 30:7
 14. 40:85
 15. Tafsir Nur al-Thiqalayn, under the blessed Verse in question.
 16. Atyab al-Bayan, under the blessed Verse in question.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-16/surah-al-ghafir-verses-64>
-85