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Section 12: Warning With the Punishment

Surah al-'Araf – Verse 94

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَضُرَّعُونَ

94. “And We did not send a prophet in any town but We vertook its people with distress and affliction hat they might humble themselves.”

The Qur'anic term /ba's/ means some calamities which reach the soul, like death; while the term /darr/ means: financial damages. 1

As an Allah's way of treatment, there are some bitter events and calamities for all nations.

It is noteworthy that difficulties and hardships are usually some functional factors in removing neglectfulness and in training man. Also, calamities are not always the Wrath of Allah. They are sometimes the grace of Allah in the form of misfortunes.

(Like some iron which, as a result of being heated in the furnace, becomes soft and changeable into different shapes. Afflictions cause man to be mild, too.) Difficulties also make Man humiliate and supplicate.

The verse says:

“And We did not send a prophet in any town but We overtook its people with distress and affliction that they might humble themselves.”²

Imam Sadiq (as) in a tradition said:

“Allah, Almighty and Glorious, said: ‘When the one who has known Me disobeys Me, I will set up, as an

absolute master over him, the one who has not known Me'." 3

Hadrat abul-Hassan-il-Hadi, the tenth Imam (as) has said:

*"Verily Allah has a caller who calls every day and night 'O' servants of Allah! Stop! stop sinning Allah! If there were not grazing animals, milking babies, and (in prayer) bowing aged ones, there would be showered a punishment over you by which you might be severely bruised'."*4

Surah al-'Araf , Verse 95

ثُمَّ بَدَّلْنَا مَكَانَ السَّيِّئَةِ الْحَسَنَةَ حَتَّىٰ عَفَوا وَقَالُوا قَدْ مَسَّ آبَاءَنَا الضَّرَّاءُ وَالسَّرَّاءُ
فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

95. "Then We altered the ill (circumstances) to good, until they multiplied, and said: 'Distress and happiness did indeed touch our fathers'. So We seized them suddenly while they did not perceive."

The Arabic term /'afau/, mentioned in this verse, means 'the abundance of wealth and children'. The grace of Allah reached to be full unto them, but they did not become aware nor did they take an example.

A nearly similar meaning to this statement is recited in Surah Al-'An'am, No. 6, verse 44, where it says:

"Then, when they forgot that which they had been admonished to, We opened the doors of all things (of enjoyments), until when they rejoiced in what they were given, We seized them suddenly when, behold, they were in utter despair."

The case is similar to the condition of a sick person whose physician becomes disappointed of him to be healed. Then he tells the people around him that they let him eat everything he wishes, because it is indifferent for the diseased person, and he is passing away.

However, as some commentators have said, there may also be another meaning for this verse. That meaning is that, after the removal of difficulties, the following generation said that bitter events were for their fathers and these offsprings were in security.

They were neglectful that Allah's way of treatment in seizing people encompasses all generations, and such negligences are the secret of the Wrath of Allah.

Therefore, passing by the bitter and sweet incidents heedlessly, and taking no example of them, brings forth the Wrath of Allah thereafter. This status is a sign of unawareness in such people.

“...while they did not perceive.”

Not every kind of welfare and happiness is a sign of the Grace of Allah. They may sometimes prepare the field for the Wrath of Allah. The verse says:

“Then We altered the ill (circumstances) to good, until they multiplied...”

Sometimes it happens that the welfare of a person causes his neglectfulness and his disobedience from the command of Allah (s.w.t).

“...and said: ‘Distress and happiness did indeed touch our fathers’...”

Most of those who fail in the Divine trials are the rich and the people who are in welfare, not the deprived ones.

It should also be noted that the Wrath of Allah does not inform men when it has to come, but it comes suddenly.

The verse says:

“...So We seized them suddenly while they did not perceive.”

Surah al-‘Araf, Verse 96

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ
وَلَكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

96. “And if the people of the towns had believed and kept from evil, We would have certainly opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they belied; so We seized them for what they used to earn.”

The Arabic term /barakāt/ is the plural form of /barakah/. It is applied for the fix and continual favours. On the contrary, there are some fleeting things in the senses of blessing, plurality of good and its multiplication. Blessings include both material and spiritual bounties, like blessings in lifetimes, in knowledge, and in books.

The verse says:

“And if the people of the towns had believed and kept from evil, We would have certainly opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth...”

It implies that if the people of the towns, who were destroyed because of denial and disobedience, had testified the Divine prophets and had avoided polytheism and sinning, Allah would have bestowed upon them the increasing blessings from the heaven and the earth by means of rain and abundance of plants and fruits.

Noah also promised his people if they believed, the blessings of heaven would be sent down unto them.

Some commentators say that blessings of the heaven, mentioned in this holy verse, refer to the supplications which are answered, and the blessings of the earth are the fulfilment of the requests.

The verse continues saying:

“...but they belied; so We seized them for what they used to earn.”

That is, they rejected the divine prophets, and Allah punished them for the recompense of their disobediences, oppositions, and belying the prophets by ceasing rain from them, and, consequently, the blessings of the earth were restrained from them.

Surah al-‘Araf, Verses 97–98

أَفَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا بَيَاتًا وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ

أَوْ أَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا ضُحًى وَهُمْ يُلْعَبُونَ

97. “What! do the people of the towns then feel secure from Our punishment coming upon them by night while they are sleeping?”

98. “What! do the people of the towns feel secure from Our punishment coming upon them in daylight while they are playing?”

It questions whether the people of towns, who reject the prophets, are secure from the punishment of Allah when it comes down upon them while they are asleep at night, the same as it befell upon the former people.

The verse says:

“What! do the people of the towns then feel secure from Our punishment coming upon them by night while they are sleeping?”

Again, it questions whether the people of towns are secure from the punishment of Allah when it seizes them at the day time while they are busy doing some vain affairs.

The verse says:

“What! do the people of the towns feel secure from Our punishment coming upon them in daylight while they are playing?”

It is evident that whoever is busy with the mere affairs of this world and does not heed the affairs of Hereafter is in vain and, as if, he is playing around.

The purpose of the Qur’ānic phrase ‘the people of the towns’ is any group of people who are busy with some useless affairs, and who reject divine prophets, and they refrain worshipping One God.

The occasion of revelation of these two verses, of course, was the obstinacies of the pagans of Mecca.

Surah al-‘Araf , Verse 99

أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

99. “What! Do they then feel secure from Allah’s plan (sudden punishment)? But none feels secure from Allah’s plan save the people (who are) losers.”

The verse begins thus:

“what! do they then feel secure from Allah’s plan (sudden punishment)?...”

The verse implies whether these disbelieving people are secure when the divine punishment befalls them so that they do not understand.

The reason that the divine punishment is called here ‘plan’ is that it seizes them in a way that they do not know it and they do not understand it.

A plan, or plot, usually attacks the opposite party unawares.

The verse continues saying:

“...But none feels secure from Allah’s plan save the people (who are) losers.”

That is, except the people who are losers, and they do not know it, no one feels secure from the plan of Allah.

The purpose of this verse is to attract the attention of the responsible ones to be careful and attentive that they should be afraid of Allah's punishment, and they should obey Him. Never should they promise themselves security from that punishment, otherwise they will be involved in chastisement both in this world and Hereafter.

1. Tafsīr-i-Furqān

2. For more details upon the meaning of the Qur'ānic terms /ba's'/' and /darr'/', refer to the commentary of Surah Al-'An'ām, No. 6, verse 42, vol. 5, p. 124 the current English version series of commentary of the Holy Qur'ān.

3. 'Usūl-i-Kāfi, part 3, p. 378

4. 'Usūl al-Kāfi, part 3, p. 378

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