

Section 2: The Companions of the Cave

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 11 – 13

فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَىٰ آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحَزِينِ أَحْصَىٰ لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاَهُمْ هُدًى

11. “Then We set over their ears (a curtain of sleep) in the Cave for a number of years.”

12. “Afterwards We raised them up in order to test which of the two parties would better calculate the time they had tarried.”

13. “We relate to you their story with the truth; verily they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance.”

Then Allah accepted the prayer of ‘the Companions of the Cave’ and covered a veil of sleep over their ears in the Cave so that they slept for a number of years. Then, He roused them in order to test and make it clear which of those two parties was best at calculating the term of years they had slept.

Here are the statements of the Qur'an:

“Then We set over their ears (a curtain of sleep) in the Cave for a number of years.”

“Afterwards We raised them up in order to test which of the two parties would better calculate the

time they had tarried.”

Next to a short statement of this story, the Qur’an refers to it by detailed explanation through fourteen verses, and begins explaining it as follows:

“We relate to you their story with the truth...”

Then the Qur’an continues saying:

“...verily they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance.”

It is understood precisely from the Qur’an and vastly from the history that the Companions of the Cave were living in an environment and at a time that idolatry and polytheism had surrounded them.

A tyrannical government, which was the protector and the guardian of paganism, infidelity, ignorance, and offence committed against those people, had cast an inauspicious shadow upon them.

But this group of youths, who had enjoyed an enough spiritual intelligence and truthfulness, realized the corruption of that creed and decided to rise against it, or, if they could not afford to stand against it, they would emigrate from that polluted environment.

Explanations

People are divided into three groups in connection with corruption which is done in a polluted society:

1. A part of people may assume the corruption of the society. These are those who do not migrate, and have not a complete Faith, either.
2. There are some people who are inside a polluted society but they try to protect themselves from pollution, (like the Companions of the Cave).
3. There are also a group of people who change others and improve their polluted society into a good one, (like prophets and saints).

However, there are some Islamic traditions which indicate that the Companions of the Cave will be amongst the friends and helpers of Hadrat Mahdi (May Allah hasten his glad advent). 1

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 14 – 16

وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَن نَدْعُوهُ مِنْ
دُونِهِ إِلَهًا لَقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذًا شَطَطًا

هُؤُلَاءِ قَوْمُنَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيْنِ يَمِينٍ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا

وَإِذِ اعْتَزَلْتُمُوهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَأْوُوا إِلَى الْكَهْفِ يَنْشُرْ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيُهَيِّئْ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مِرفَقًا

14. **“And We strengthened their hearts, when they stood up and said: ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth; never will we call upon any god besides Him, for then we should have uttered extravagantly’.**”

15. **“These our people have taken gods other than Him; why do they not bring any clear authority regarding them? Who is then more unjust than he who forges a lie against Allah?”**

16. **“And when you withdraw from them and what they worship save Allah, then seek refuge in the Cave, (and) your Lord will shower on you of His mercy, and furnish you with a gentle issue of your affair.”**

Following the former discussion, the Qur’an implies that their hearts were given strength when they stood up and said that their Lord is the Lord of the heavens and of the earth, and that they would never call upon any god other than Him, since if they did so, they would indeed had uttered an extravagance.

The verse says:

“And We strengthened their hearts, when they stood up and said: ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth; never will we call upon any god besides Him, for then we should have uttered extravagantly’.”

In fact, those faithful youths, in order to prove Unity and negate any gods attached a manifest proof and said that they saw clearly that the heavens and the earth had a Lord, and the existence of the regulation of creation was a reason for their existence, and they were a part of that existence.

Therefore, they said that their Lord was also the same Lord of the heavens and of the earth.

Then, they attached to another reasoning and said that their people had taken some gods for worship other than Him.

The verse says:

“These our people have taken gods other than Him...”

Can a belief exist without having any proof and reasoning? Then, why did they not bring a clear proof for

the deity of those gods?

The verse continues saying:

“...why do they not bring any clear authority regarding them?...”

Can an imagination or illusion or a blindly imitation be taken as a proof for such a belief? What a manifest injustice and a great aberration it is!

Therefore, the verse says:

“...Who is then more unjust than he who forges a lie against Allah?”

This ‘calumny’ is an injustice both unto him himself and unto the society wherein he announces this falsehood and he deviates it. Also, it can be considered as an injustice unto the Pure Essence of the Lord, as well as a disdain unto his Exalted Rank.

Those youths, the monotheists, tried to do their best to wipe out the rust of polytheism from the hearts, and to grow the twig of Unity in their place, but the shout of idolatry was so load in that environment that their melodies of Unity were lost in their throats.

Then, in order to deliver themselves from that corruptive environment, and to find a quieter place, they could not help deciding to migrate.

Thus, they began consulting with each other. They said among themselves that when they turned away from those idolaters and that which they worshipped besides Allah, and separated their own account from theirs, they should seek refuge in the Cave.

The verse says:

“And when you withdraw from them and what they worship save Allah, then seek refuge in the Cave...”

It was in that case that their Lord would unfold to them of His mercy and might open to them a way from their difficulty towards calmness, easiness, and happiness.

Then the verse continues saying:

“...(and) your Lord will shower on you of His mercy, and furnish you with a gentle issue of your affair.”

Explanations

1. The Arabic term /šatata/ means: ‘extravagant separation from truth, and saying a falsehood which by no means is acceptable’.

2. The term /'iftira/ (calumny) involves with the meaning of 'lie', yet the word /ka'ibā/ has again been applied in the verse. This application, maybe, is for the fact that there are two kinds of 'calumny'.

In one kind, there is sometimes the probability of this attribution, but, sometimes, there is not any probability of it either. And polytheism is of the second kind, because attributing partners to 'The Infinite Power and Knowledge' is impossible.

3. This holy verse is from the tongue of the leader of the Companions of the Cave, which makes the youths accompanied with him hopeful of the mercy of the Lord and that He provides them with a gentle issue of their affair. A true monotheist both leaves out idols, and separates from idol-worshippers.

Being a Cave-dweller with the atmosphere of Divine Unity is better than being a citizen in the atmosphere of paganism.

Its example is Yusuf, the Prophet (as), who preferred being in the prison to living in the castle, and he said:

"...My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than that to which they invite me..."²

1. Muntakhab-ul-'Athar, p.485

2. Surah Yusuf, No.12, verse 33

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-9/section-2-companions-cave>