

Section 4: The Mission of Abraham, Lot, Shu'ayb and Moses

Surah Al-'Ankabut – Verse 31

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا إِنَّا مُهْلِكُوا أَهْلَ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ إِنَّ أَهْلَهَا
كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ

31. “And when Our messengers came to Abraham with the glad tidings (of a son unto him), they said: ‘Verily we are going to destroy the people of this town, for verily its people are unjust.’”

In Sahifah Sajjadiyyah, Imam Sajjad (as) mentions some groups of angels each of which has a special responsibility, but those angels who came to Hadrat 'Ibrahim (as) had several aims. They were missions both for giving glad tidings of a child to Abraham (as), and for announcing the punishment of the people of Lot, and the executives of the Divine punishment.

This verse indicates that finally the supplication of Lot was accepted and the command of a heavy and severe punishment for this evil people was issued from the side of Allah.

Before their arrival to the land of Lot for performing their mission, the angels of punishment went to the area where Abraham lived for the fulfilment of another mission, i.e. the glad tidings of the birth of children to Abraham (as)

The abovementioned verse, at first, refers to their meeting with Abraham (as) and says:

“And when Our messengers came to Abraham with the glad tidings (of a son unto him)...”

Then, pointing to the cities of the people of Lot, the angels added to their statement as follows:

“...they said: ‘Verily we are going to destroy the people of this town, for verily its people are unjust’.”

The application of the Qur’anic phrase */haḥīhil qaryah/ (this town)* is an evidence that the cities of the people of Lot were in the neighbourhood of Abraham’s land.

The application of the Arabic word */zalim/ (unjust)* is for the sake that they were unjust both to themselves, who took the way of polytheism, immorality, and corruptibility, and to others so that their injustice and cruelty involved even all the wayfarers and the caravans that crossed that land.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verse 32

قَالَ إِنَّ فِيهَا لُوطًا قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ فِيهَا لَنَنْجِيَنَّهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ
الْغَابِرِينَ

32. “Said (Abraham to the messenger angels): ‘Verily Lot is in it.’ They said: ‘We know very well who is in it; we shall certainly deliver him and his family, except his wife; she shall of those who stay behind’.”

The social title is not important, but the Faith and righteous deed are criterions. Being the prophet’s wife alone is not a value, but being in his accompany and following him is a value. The wives of prophets are not sinless. (Even among the wives of the Prophet of Islam (S) only a few of them were favoured by the special grace of Allah.

This noble verse indicates that when Abraham heard this statement, he worried about Lot, the great prophet of Allah, and he asked about his fate.

The verse says:

“Said (Abraham to the messenger angels): ‘Verily Lot is in it.’...”

Then the messenger angels, in answer to him, immediately said that he should not be worried:

“... They said: ‘We know very well who is in it...’”

They meant that never Allah chastises evildoers and good doers with together and His program is completely accurate and calculated.

Then, they added:

“...we shall certainly deliver him and his family, except his wife; she shall of those who stay

behind’.”

It is understood from this verse that in all of those cities there was only one pure faithful family and Allah delivered them on time, either; as it is mentioned in Surah Ath-Thariyat:

“But We found not there any except one Muslim household.”¹

And, moreover, the wife of Lot was also out of the row of believers and, therefore, she was punished.

The Arabic word /qabirin/ is the plural form of /qabir/ with the sense of ‘the one whose companions go only he one remains. The woman who was among the family of prophethood must not separate from the Muslims and believers, but her infidelity, polytheism, and idolatry caused her separation.

This makes clear that her deviation was only from the point of belief, and it is not improbable that she had got this deviation from her own environment while at the beginning she had been faithful and monotheist; and in this case there will be no objection to Lot that why he married such a woman.

By the way, if there were some other people who had believed in Lot, they would certainly have migrated from that polluted land before this event. It was only Lot and his family that had to stay there until the last hour that he thought his teaching and warning might have an effect in them.

There may arise a question here that did Abraham (as) think that probably the punishment of Allah might seize Lot, too, that he expressed his worry about Lot before the angels and they assured him that Lot would be delivered?

The clear answer to this question is that Abraham knew the matter but for the certainty of his heart he asked, as this very great prophet had a similar condition about Resurrection and by restoring the birds to life Allah illustrated the scenery of Resurrection in front of him.

But ‘Allamah Tabataba’i, the great commentator, believes that the aim of Abraham was that he took the existence of Lot among that nation as a reason for removing the punishment from them, and ‘Allamah takes help from Surah Hud, No. 11, verses 74–76 for this purpose, because these verses say:

“...he began disputing with Us concerning the people of Lot.”

“O Abraham! Forsake this! Indeed the decree of your Lord has come to pass and surely there is coming (upon) them an irreversible chastisement.”²

But we believe that the answer that the angels gave here about the deliverance of Lot and his family clearly shows that in these verses only Lot was spoken of, while the verses of Surah Hud pursue a separate matter and, as we said, Abraham (as) asked this question only for being assured more. (Be careful)

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verse 33

وَلَمَّا أَن جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ
إِنَّا مُنَجُّوكَ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَكَ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ

33. “And when Our messengers came to Lot he was grieved on their account and distressed for them; but they said: ‘Fear not, nor grieve, for verily we shall deliver you and your family, except your wife, she shall be of those who stay behind.’”

In a polluted society the men of Allah are in straitened circumstances, and even for protecting their own guests and children they are worried, too.

The family relation does not save a person but faith and righteous deed is the key of deliverance.

This verse says:

“And when Our messengers came to Lot he was grieved on their account and distressed for them...”

Lot’s anxiety was for that he did not know them. They were in the form of some handsome youths, and the arrival of such guests in that polluted environment might become the source of trouble for Lot and probably disrespect before his guests. Therefore, he became seriously thoughtful that what the reaction of those astray, disgrace and shameless people might be before these honourable guests.

The Qur’anic **/si’a/** is derived from /sa’a/ in the sense of ‘to become grievous’; and the Arabic word **/ʿar’a/** means: ‘heart’ or ‘temper’. Thus, the Qur’anic phrase: **/daqa bihim ʿar’a/** means **‘he became grievous and inconvenient.’**

Some of the Islamic commentators have said that this phrase originally means ‘the distance between the front legs of a camel at the time of walking’ and since when a heavy load is put on its back it decreases the distance of its steps lesser and narrower, this sentence **/daqa ʿar’a/** is mentioned as ironically for a heavy and laborious event.

But when the guests found his inconvenience soon they introduced themselves and removed his anxiety and told him those shameless people could not do anything, and all of them would be annihilated soon.

The verse says:

“...but they said: ‘Fear not, nor grieve, for verily we shall deliver you and your family, except your wife, she shall be of those who stay behind.’”

Of course, the verses of Surah Hud clearly show that when those evil people were informed of the arrival of the guests of Lot they came to him and intended to bother them.

Lot, who had not known the angels, became very anxious, wanted to hinder them from doing that action: sometimes with advice, sometimes with threat, sometimes by way of arousing their conscience, saying that:

“...is there not among you one upright man?”³

and sometimes by the way of suggesting them to marry his daughters. But those disgrace people did not accept anything and they thought only of their own evil aim.

But the messengers of Allah introduced themselves to Lot (as) and by means of Divine miracle made the eyes of those attacking persons blind and caused the heart of this great prophet to rest.

It is notable that the messenger angels of Allah told Lot (as) that he should not fear and grieve. Concerning the difference between /*xauf*/ and /*huzn*/ it is cited in Al-Mizan, the commentary, that /*xauf*/ is used about the inconvenient probable events and /*huzn*/ about some decisive and certain instances.

Some commentators believe that the Qur’anic word ***/xauf/ (fear)*** relates to the future events and the term ***/qam/ (grief)*** relates to the past events.

It is also probable that ***/xauf/*** is used in relation to dangerous instances, but ***/qam/*** is related to painful events, though there is no danger in them.

There is a question here that according to the verses of Surah Hud the fear and grief of Lot were not about himself, but he feared that those evil people might make trouble for his guests while the answer the angels gave him was about the deliverance of Lot and his family and these two are not consistent with each other.

The answer to this question can be understood from Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 81, because when the shameful people came to bother the guests, the angels told Lot:

“...fear not nor grieve, for verily we shall deliver you and your family...”⁴

That is, ‘they not only cannot bother us, but also are not able to hurt you.’ Therefore, the angels took their deliverance certain, and verily it was certain, and they concentrated the glad tidings on the deliverance of Lot and his family.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verses 34–35

إِنَّا مُنْزِلُونَ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ رِجْزًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ

وَلَقَدْ تَرَكْنَا مِنْهَا آيَةً بَيِّنَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

34. “Verily We are bringing down upon the people of this town a punishment from heaven for what they were transgressing.”

35. “And certainly We have left a clear sign of it for a people who have sense.”

The repetition of sin and persisting to its doing cause the descent of the chastisement of Allah.

The acquaintance with the philosophy of history and being acquainted with past generations are regarded by the Qur'an.

In order that the fate of this polluted group of people might be made more clear in their mission, the Qur'an adds:

“Verily We are bringing down upon the people of this town a punishment from heaven for what they were transgressing.”

The objective of the Qur'anic word */qaryah/ (town)* is 'Sudum' and the cities and towns around it where the people of Lot used to live. The population of them has been mentioned seven hundred thousand people.⁵

And the objective of the Arabic term */rijz/* here is '**punishment**'. Its original meaning is '**anxiety**', then everything that causes anxiety is called */rijz/* and thus Arabs use it in a lot of senses, like harsh afflictions, plaque, intensive snow and hail, idol, the temptation of Satan, and Divine punishment.

The Qur'anic sentence */bima kanu yafsuqun/* (for what they were transgressing) states the cause of their painful punishment that was transgression and disobedience from the command of Allah, and its application in future form of the verb is an indication to the continuation of their ugly deeds.

This meaning shows this fact that if those people stopped the continuation of it and returned to the path of right, piety and purity, they would not be involved in such a punishment and their past sins would be forgiven.

In this verse the manner of their painful punishment has not been explained, and it only refers to the ruins of their afflicted and non-afflicted cities, when it says:

“And certainly We have left a clear sign of it for a people who have sense.”

But the explanation of their punishment is referred to in Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 82 and Surah Al-'Araf, No 7, verse 84, implying that at first a severe earthquake turned their cities upside down and then a shower of stone rained on them in a way that their bodies and their ruined cities and castles were buried under it.

The application of the Qur'anic phrase *'ayatan bayyinatan/ (a clear sign)* refers to the remaining of the city of 'Sudum' which, according to the verses of the Qur'an, was located alongside the way of the caravans of the people of Medina and Mecca and they could see it at the advent of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam (S), as Surah Al-Hijr, No. 15, verse 76 says:

"It is on a way (yet) remaining."

and Surah As-Saffat, No. 37, verse 137–138 says:

"Verily you pass by their (cities) by day," "And by night; will you not ponder?"

Surah Al-'Ankabut – Verse 36

وَالِي مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَارْجُوا الْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَلَا تَعْتَوْا فِي
الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

36. "And to Madyan (We did send) their brother Shu'ayb, so he said: 'O my people! Worship Allah, and look you for the Last Day; and do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief.'"

Monotheism and Resurrection are at the top of the godly invitation of the Divine prophets.

The servitude unto Allah (s.w.t.) and the belief in Origin and Resurrection both are some preparation for separation from corruption.

Next to the story of Lot and his people, the stories of other peoples, such as the people of Shu'ayb, the people of 'Ad, the people of Thamud, Korah and Pharaoh, come forth.

At first, it says:

"And to Madyan (We did send) their brother Shu'ayb..."

As we have repeatedly said before, the application of the word 'brother' in the verse refers to the utmost love and affection of these prophets unto their peoples, and it shows the lack of seeking domination over them. These prophets, of course, had often relation with their peoples, too.

Madyan is a city in the west south of Jordan which is called Mu'an today and it is located in the east of 'Aqabah Gulf, where Shu'ayb and his people lived.

Like other great Divine prophets, Shu'ayb began his invitation from belief in Origin and Resurrection which are the foundation of any Divine religion.

The verse says:

“...so he said: ‘O my people! Worship Allah, and look you for the Last Day...”

Belief in Origin causes man to feel constant observation from the side of Allah upon his deeds, and belief in Resurrection reminds man of the great court where everything of man will be dealt with entirely.

Belief in these two great principles will certainly have an extraordinary effect in training and improvement of man.

The third command of Shu‘ayb was an inclusive practical order which envelops all social programs.

He said:

“...and do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief.”

The word corruption has a vast meaning which encompasses any kind of vice, disturbance, destruction, deviation, and transgression. The opposite point to it is righteousness and reconciliation in the concept of which the whole constructive programs are gathered.

The Qur’anic term ***Ita’aul*** is derived from /’aa/ in the meaning of ‘to make mischief’, with the difference that this meaning is mostly used in relation of ethical corruptions. Therefore, mentioning the Qur’anic word /mufsidin/ after it is for emphasis.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verse 37

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

37. “But they belied him, so the earth quake seized them, and they lay (deed) in their abodes motionless by the morning.”

The Arabic word /rajfah/ means the shake of the earth. The word /’arajif/ is used for the news ad words which cause instability in the faith and spirit of people, and the word /marjuf/ is used for those who say or write such matters.

This verse implies that the people of Shu‘ayb, instead of hearkening to the advices of this great reformer, tried to reject him.

“But they belied him...”

This act of theirs caused that a severe earthquake seized them. The verse continues saying:

“...so the earth quake seized them...”

The Arabic term */jaim/* is derived from */jam/* in the sense of ‘sitting on the knee’ and ‘staying in one place’.

It is not improbable that this meaning refers to the fact that at the time of this severe earthquake they were asleep and suddenly they got up. As soon as they sat on their knees, the event did not give them respite, and by falling down the walls, which was accompanied with that fatal earthquake, they lost their own lives.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verse 38

وَعَادًا وَثَمُودًا وَقَدْ تَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ مِنْ مَسَاكِنِهِمْ وَزَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ
عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَكَانُوا مُسْتَبْصِرِينَ

38. “And (We destroyed) ‘Ad and Thamud, and it has become clear to you from their dwelling-places, and Satan made their deeds fair-seeming unto them, so he kept them back from the (right) path, though they were keen-sighted.”

Pride, self-admiration, and boasting for wealth and power are some examples of satanic ornamentations.

Man naturally loves beauty and adornment, and the Satan misuses this man’s inner quality.

In this verse, the words are about the people of ‘Ad and the people of Thamud without mentioning any thing about their prophets (Hud and Salih) and their talks to these two obstinate peoples, because they were two known nations that the story of their prophets has been repeatedly referred to in other verses of the Qur’an.

It says:

“And (We destroyed) ‘Ad and Thamud...”

Then, it adds implying that the ruins of their cities in the lands of Hijr and Yemen are alongside your way.

“...and it has become clear to you from their dwelling-places...”

In your journeys toward Yemen and Syria for commerce and trade, every year you cross the land Hijr, which is located in the north of Arabia, and the land of ‘Ahqaf, which is located in the south and near to Yemen, and you observe the ruins of the cities of ‘Ad and Thamud with your own eyes; then why do you

not take an example?

Then, the noble verse points to the main cause of their wretchedness and says:

“...and Satan made their deeds fair-seeming unto them, so he kept them back from the (right) path...”

They treated like that while they had keen eyes and intellect. Their nature was on Monotheism and piety, and the Divine prophets had also shown them sufficiently the right path.

The verse continues saying:

“...though they were keen-sighted.”

Some commentators have taken this sentence in the sense of having vigilant eyes and enough wisdom, while some others have meant it into ‘safe nature’, and some others into correct use of the guidance of Divine prophets.

It does not matter that the holy verse contains all these meanings, indicating that they were not ignorant, but formerly they knew the truth well and they had vigilant conscience, enough intellect, and the prophets completed the argument for them, yet they left the invitation of the prophets and went after the temptations of Satan, and day after another day their evil deeds seemed beautiful to them, and they reached a point where they had no way to return.

The law of reaction burnt these dry, fruitless pieces of wood in fire of their deeds, and this was their own compensation.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verse 39

وَقَارُونَ وَفِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مُوسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَمَا كَانُوا سَابِقِينَ

39. “And (We destroyed) Korah, and Pharaoh, and Haman; and indeed Moses came unto them with clear proofs, but they behaved haughtily in the land, yet they could not outstrip (Us).”

The end of arrogance is destruction and their evil fate is a gazing-stock. Allah’s way of treatment is to complete argument and then taking to task will come forth.

In this holy verse, the Qur’an mentions the names of three persons each of whom was a clear sample of a satanic power.

It says:

“And (We destroyed) Korah, and Pharaoh, and Haman...”

Korah was the epiphany of wealth together with pride, egoism, and negligence. Pharaoh was the epiphany of arrogant power furnished with mischievousness; and Haman was an example of being the assistant of the oppressive tyrants.

Then, the verse says:

“...and indeed Moses came unto them with clear proofs, but they behaved haughtily in the land...”

Korah relied on his own wealth, ornament, treasures, and knowledge, while Pharaoh and Haman relied on having army, martial forces, and the great power of propagation among unaware people.

Yet, with those abilities they had they could not precede Allah and escape from the grips of His power.

The verse continues saying:

“...yet they could not outstrip (Us).”

Allah issued the command of destruction of Korah for the land, which was the place of his rest and comfort, and He commanded water, the cause of their life, to destroy Pharaoh and Haman. For destroying them, Allah did not mobilize the hosts of heavens and the earth, but what was the cause of their life executed the command of their death!⁶

The Arabic term /sabiqin/ is the plural form of term /sabiq/ which means: ‘the one who precedes’ and if it says /ma kanu sabiqin/ (they did not overreach) its concept is that ‘they could not escape from the domain of the Power of Allah with all possibilities they had and be saved from the punishment of Allah; but He annihilated them with abasement and humiliation at the same moment He decided.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verse 40

فَكُلًّا أَخَذْنَا بِذَنْبِهِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِ حَاصِبًا وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَخَذَتْهُ الصَّيْحَةُ
وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ خَسَفْنَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَغْرَقْنَا وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَكِنْ
كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

40. “So each (one of them) We seized (in punishment) for his sin; and of them, against some We sent a violent tornado (with showers of stones), some were caught by a mighty Blast; some We caused the earth to swallow up, and some We drowned; and it was not Allah to do injustice to

them, but they unto their own selves did injustice.”

We must not become proud when Allah gives us respite, since the end of sin is retribution, and it is easy for Allah to punish us with kinds of punishments.

Therefore, in this verse He says:

“So each (one of them) We seized (in punishment) for his sin...”

Indeed, since there were mentioned four groups in the previous two verses whose punishments were not mentioned there, (the people of ‘Ad, the people of Thamud, Korah, Pharaoh, and Haman), in the above verse their chastisements are stated sequentially, as follows:

“...and of them, against some We sent a violent tornado (with showers of stones)...”

The Qur’anic word */hasib/* means: ‘**a violent wind bringing with it a shower of stones**’. The Arabic word */hasban/* means ‘pebbles’.

The objective of mentioning this group is ‘the people of ‘Ad’ that, according to suras Ath–Thariyat, Al–Haqqah, and Qamar, a violent and harsh wind came over them for seven nights and eight days. It ruined their houses and threw their corpses here and there like the leaves of the trees in fall.⁷

The verse continues:

“...some were caught by a mighty Blast...”

We have said that the heavenly blast is the result of thunderbolts which are usually accompanied with earthquake at the center of its occurrence, and this was the chastisement which came down upon the people of Thamud, and some other peoples, as Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 67 says about the people of Thamud:

“And the (mighty) Blast overtook those who were unjust, so they became motionless corpses in their abodes.”

And in Surah Al–Qasas, No. 28, verse 81 the Qur’an says:

“And We caused the earth to swallow up him...”

This was the punishment which Korah, the rich, proud and arrogant person from the Children of Israel received; and, finally, Allah drowned some others of them.

The verse says:

“...some We caused the earth to swallow up, and some We drowned...”

We know that this meaning points to Pharaoh, Haman, and their followers which has been mentioned in different Suras of the Qur'an.

However, keeping this statement in mind, the above four chastisements are sequentially for the four evil groups whose deviation, stray, and sins were referred to in previous two verses without mentioning their punishments.

For an emphasis upon this fact that they got the result of their own deeds and reaped the product of the seed of which they themselves had scattered, at the end of the verse, the Qur'an says:

“...and it was not Allah to do injustice to them, but they unto their own selves did injustice.”

Yes, the punishments in this world and the next world are some reactions and embodiments of man's deeds when they close all the doors of improvement and return to the truth to them.

Allah is more just than He does the slightest injustice and transgression to any person.

Like many other verses of the Qur'an, this verse clearly strengthens the principle of freedom of will in man, and makes this fact fully clear that making decision everywhere and for everything belongs to man himself, and Allah has created him free, and wanted him to be free.

Therefore, the belief of the followers of the school of fatalism, who also exist among Muslims, is made futile by this strong logic of the Qur'an.

Surah Al-'Ankabut - Verse 41

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ
الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

41. “The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house but verily the frailest of (all) houses is the house of the spider, if they but know (this).”

To use parables is one of the best methods applied in education, and the best parable is the parable which is tangible for all levels of people everywhere and in any time.

Taking the name of 'Ankabut (spider) from this verse, the Surah under discussion has been entitled 'Ankabut.

It has been narrated from Plato who said that fly is the greediest insect which, for its livelihood, often sits

on pickle, confectionery, a taint, and a wound, but a spider weaves in a corner and has continence. It is interesting that Allah has set the most active and the greediest insect as the prey of the most retiring insect. A fly goes toward the spider and it hunts the fly by its webs.

However, in the previous verses the painful and sad fate of the mischievous, arrogant, obstinate, unjust, and self-loving pagans was stated. In this relation, in this verse there has been stated an interesting parable for those who take objects of worship and guardian besides Allah for themselves, in a way that the more we contemplate about this parable, the more points we gain from it.

It says:

“The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house but verily the frailest of (all) houses is the house of the spider, if they but know (this).”

What an expressive and interesting parable, and what a comprehensive and minute simile it is!

You can be careful that every animal and insect has a house or a nest for itself, but none of them is as weak as the spider's house.

In principle, a house must have walls, a roof, and a door and it protects its owner from bad events, and maintains his food and necessary things in it. Some houses have not ceiling but they have at least a wall, or they have not walls while they have ceilings.

But the spider's house, which is made of a few very thin webs that has neither any wall, nor any ceiling, nor any yard, nor any door.

These are from one side. On the other side, its materials are so weak and unstable that they resist before no event, and if a mild wind blows, it will tear the webs entirely. If a few drops of rain fall on it, they destroy it wholly. The least flame of fire burns it. It will be torn up even with a little dust, and it will hang on the ceiling.

The false objects of worship of this group have neither any profit nor harm, nor can remove any difficulty, nor can be a place of refuge for any one of them on the day of affliction.

It is true that this house not only is a resting place for the spider, with its long legs, but also a snare for hunting insects and earning food, while comparing it with the houses of other animals and insects it is very weak and unstable.

Those who choose a support other than Allah, their support is as the web of spider. The crown and throne of persons like Pharaoh, the endless wealth of individuals such as Korah, the castles and treasures of the kings all are like the webs of a spider: They are weak, unstable, unreliable and ephemeral before the storm of events.

The history also shows that: verily none of these things can be the support of man, but those who rely on their faith and trust in Allah, they have relied on a firm and strong support.

It is also necessary to note that though the house of spider and its webs are used as a proverb for its weakness, that is one of the wonders of the world of creation and paying attention to it makes man more acquainted to the greatness of the Lord.

The webs of spider are made from some viscous liquid which is stored in some very small cavities as small as the needle-point located under its belly. This liquid has a special combination that when it is exposed to the weather it becomes hard and firm.

By its particular claws spider draws that liquid out from these cavities and makes its webs by it.

It is said that by this little liquid that it has, each spider is able to make about five hundred meters web.

Some commentators have said that the weakness of these webs is because of their extraordinary tenderness; else it is stronger than a steel string with the same thinness.

It is surprising that each of these webs sometimes comes out from a very small hole which is in its body. Now you may think that how tender, exact, and narrow every one of these secondary webs is produced!

Besides the wonderful materials which have been used in the structure of a spider's house, its structural shape is also interesting. If you look carefully at the sound houses of spiders, you will see an interesting scenery like a sun with its sunbeams that are built on some particular bases made of the same webs.

This house, of course, is a suitable and ideal house for spider, but on the whole, there cannot be considered a house weaker than that; and the objects that they worship other than Allah are like that house.

Regarding the fact that spider is not only of one kind, and some scholars claim that more than twenty thousand sorts of spider have been known until now and each of them has some specialties, the greatness and power of Allah is made in the creation of this small creature.

However, the application of the Qur'anic word *'auliya'* (**the plural form of *waliy***) instead of *'asnam* (idols) may point to this fact that not only the man-made objects of worship, but also the leaders of non-religious groups are in the same row.

The sentence */lau kanu ya'lamun/* (if they but know), that is mentioned at the end of the verse, is about the idols and false objects of worship, not about the weakness of spider's house, for its weakness is known to all.

Thus, the concept of this sentence is: if they were aware of the weakness of the objects of worship and the position that they have chosen other than Allah, they would know well that these are like the web of

spider from the point of weakness.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verses 42-43

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ

42. “Verily, Allah knows whatever thing they call upon besides Him; and He is the Mighty, the Wise.”

43. “And such are the parables We set forth for mankind, but none understand them but the learned (ones).”

The man’s inclinations to other than Allah (s.w.t.) are in the knowledge of Allah, and we must make us ready to answer for it.

The verse says:

“Verily, Allah knows whatever thing they call upon besides Him...”

Instead of relying on other than Allah, which is as weak and baseless as the spider’s house, we must rely on Allah, Who is the Mighty, the invincible.

The verse continues saying:

“...and He is the Mighty, the Wise.”

However, in this verse the Qur’an threatens and warns these negligent unaware polytheists, and implicitly says that Allah knows whatever they call other than Him.

Neither their manifest polytheism nor their hidden one is concealed to Allah, and He is the Mighty and the Absolute Wise. If He gives respite to them, it is not for the sake that He does not know or His Power is finite, but His wisdom requires that He gives enough respite to them so that He completes the argument to all, and those who are eligible for guidance, be guided.

Some commentators have taken this sentence as an indication to the pretexts that the polytheists sought for themselves.

They used to say that if they worshipped those idols, it would not be because of the idols themselves

and they were, indeed, some symbols of stars of the sky and of their prophets and angels. They said, in fact, they prostrated for them and respected them, and their ‘good and evil’, and their ‘benefit and harm’ are in their authority.

The Holy Qur’an implies that Allah knows what things the polytheists call. Whomever they may be and whatever they may be, they are like the web of spider comparing the power of His command, and they have nothing to give them.

The next verse may refer to the rejection of the enemies of the Prophet (S) who pointed to these parables and said that how is it possible that Allah, Who is the Creator of the earth and heaven, brings forth parables to spider, fly, insects, and the like?

In answer to them, the Qur’an says:

“And such are the parables We set forth for mankind, but none understand them but the learned (ones).”

The importance and tenderness of a parable is not in its being small or big, but it is in its fitness with the aim. Sometimes its being small is its most significant point of strength.

For example, when the words are mostly about the weak and baseless supports, the parable must be chosen from spider which can illustrate this weakness, instability and lack of resistance better than anything else. This is the identity of eloquence and elegance.

That is why it is said that only the learned ones can recognize the elegance and elaborations of the Qur’an.

Surah Al-‘Ankabut – Verse 44

خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

44. “Allah created the heavens and the earth with truth, verily in this is a sign for the believers.”

The creation of the world has an aim. Our look unto the world must have an aim, too.

Materialists usually stop in recognizing the phenomena, but worshippers of Allah (theists) pass through phenomena and reach the recognition of Allah and Faith.

Therefore, this verse announces:

“Allah created the heavens and the earth with truth...”

There is no vanity and falsehood in His affair. If He brings forth parable to spider and its weak house, it is not undue; and if He has chosen a small creature for the parable, it is for stating the truth, else, He is the creator of the greatest galaxies and systems in heaven.

It is interesting that, at the end of these verses, the Qur'an emphasizes on 'Knowledge' and 'Faith'.

In one place it says:

"...if they but know"⁸,

and in another place it says:

"...but none understand them but the learned (ones)."⁹

And here it says:

"...verily in this is a sign for the believers."

This meaning points to this fact that the feature of the Truth is clear like the sunshine, but it appears in receptive ones. It needs an aware and seeking heart, a vigilant and submissive spirit before Allah; and if these blind-hearted persons do not see the Divine beauty, it is not because of its being hidden, but it is because of their blind eyes.

The End of Part (Juz') 20

1. Surah Ath-Thariyat, No. 51, verse 36

2.

3. Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 78

4. The verse under discussion

5. Ruh-ul-Bayan, Vol. 6, P. 467

6. The explanation of the life of Korah and the destruction of Pharaoh and his people have been mentioned in the commentary of Surah Al-Qasas, and Surah Al-'A'raf.

7. Surah Al-Haqqah, No. 69, verses 5 to 7

8. The current Surah, verse 41

9. The verses under discussion, No. 43

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