

Who Offended the Blind?

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Chapter 80 (Abas)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

*He (a certain Umayyad chieftain) frowned and turned away (while he was with the Prophet).
(Qur'an 80:1)*

Because there came to him the blind man (Ibn Um-Maktoom). (Qur'an 80:2)

*And what would make you know, but that, per chance, he (the blind man) might grow in purity,
(Qur'an 80:3)*

Or become reminded so that the reminder should profit him? (the blind man) (Qur'an 80:4)

As for him (the Umayyad chieftain) who considers himself free from need (rich), (Qur'an 80:5)

To him do you address yourself? (Qur'an 80:6)

*And it is not necessary for you (to preach that arrogant chieftain) if he does not purify himself.
(Qur'an 80:7)*

And as to him who comes to you striving hard, (Qur'an 80:8)

And he fears (Allah), (Qur'an 80:9)

To him (his question) you did not pay attention? (Qur'an 80:10)

Nay! surely this is (this chapter) a reminder. (Qur'an 80:11)

The occasion for the revelation of this Chapter was a historic event which took place. Once the Holy Prophet (S) was with some of the rich individuals of Quraish from the tribe of Umayyad, among them was Uthman Ibn Affan, who took the office of caliphate later. While the Messenger of Allah was preaching to them, Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktoom who was blind and was one of the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) came to see him. The Holy Prophet received him with honor and pleasure and gave him the closest place to himself.

However, the Prophet did not answer the question of the blind immediately since he was at the middle of his speech with the Qurashites. Since Abdullah was poor and blind, the chieftains of the Quraish looked down upon him and they did not like the honor and the respect bestowed upon him by the Prophet (S). They also did not like the presence of the blind among themselves and his interrupting their conversation with the Prophet (S). Finally one of the wealthy Umayyad (namely Uthman Ibn Affan) frowned at Abdullah and turned his back to him.

This act of the chieftains of Quraish displeased Allah and thus He revealed the Chapter 80 (Abas) through Gabriel at the same time. This Chapter commended Abdullah's position though poor and blind. In the first 4 verses, Allah denounced the detesting attitude of the chieftain of the Quraish. And in the later verses, Allah "reminds" his Prophet (S) that preaching an unbeliever is not necessary if the unbeliever does not intend to purify himself and offends a believer just because of his lack of wealth and health.

There are some Sunni commentators who align the Holy Prophet (S) along with below-average ordinary morals, and accuse him of insulting Abdullah, and by that, they try to say that he was not free from the weakness of character and conduct. This is while the one who insulted the poor man was a wealthy member of Umayyad who was either still non-Muslim, or had recently joined the companions (namely Uthman).

Yet some people, in order to clear the face of Uthman from such misconduct, do not have any hesitation to accuse the Prophet of such action, and to put down the Prophet in favor of Uthman. Such twist of the event was done by the Umayyad during their reign through pay-roll narrators. It is well-known that Umayyad were the most ardent enemies of the family of the Prophet (S) and Islam; as such, it was not befitting of them that their leader, Uthman, be reprimanded in the Qur'an; thus, the scholars who worked for the Umayyad were forced to write that this verse was revealed to reprimand the Prophet (S), not Uthman. Such flat-out lie was to preserve the dignity of Uthman with the price of humiliating the master of all the prophets. Here is the opinion of some Sunni commentators:

It is said that these verses came down concerning Abdullah Ibn Maktoom, he is Abdullah Ibn Shareeh Ibn Malik Ibn Rabi'a al-Fihri from (the tribe of) Bani 'Amir Ibn Louay. He came to the Messenger of Allah while he was trying to convert these people to Islam: Utbah Ibn Rabi'ah, Abu Jahl Ibn Husham, al-Abbas Ibn Abd al-Muttalib, Ubay and Umayyah sons of Khalaf. The blind man said: "O Messenger of Allah read me and teach me from what Allah has taught you."

He kept calling the Prophet and repeating his plea, not knowing that the Prophet was busy facing someone else, until the hatred appeared on the face of the Messenger of Allah for being interrupted. The Prophet said to himself these great people will say that his followers are but the blind and the slaves, so he turned away from him and faced the people he was talking to. Then the verses were revealed.

After that the Messenger used to be kind to him and if he sees him he would say "welcome to the one whom my God reproached me in him". He used to ask him if he needed anything and kept him behind as the deputy on Medina twice during wars.

The above Sunni commentary has also been mentioned in "al-Durr al- Manthoor", by al-Suyuti, with some minor differences. Abul Ala Maududi who is another Sunni commentator of Qur'an has a more moderate view. Here is his interpretation of Verse 80:17:

Here displeasure has been expressed directly for the disbelievers who were being indifferent to the Message of truth. Before this, from the beginning of the Chapter to the Verse 16, the address though apparently directed to the Holy Prophet (S), was actually mean to reprimand the disbelievers.

Sunni reference:

- Commentary of Qur'an, by Abul Ala Maududi, p1005, under the commentary of verse 80:17 (Islamic Publications (Pvt.), Lahore)

However, the fact is that Qur'an does NOT give any evidence that the person who frowned at the blind was the Prophet (S), and does not state who is being addressed. In the above verses of Qur'an Allah (SWT) did NOT address the Prophet either by name or title (i.e. O Muhammad, or O Prophet, or O Messenger). Moreover, there exists switching in the pronoun from "he" in the first two verses to "you" in the later verses of the chapter. Allah did NOT state: "You frowned and turned away". Rather, Almighty stated:

He frowned and turned away (while he was with the Prophet), (Qur'an 80:1)

Because there came to him the blind man. (Qur'an 80:2)

And what would make you know, but that, per chance, he (the blind man) might grow in purity, (Qur'an 80:3)

Even if we assume that "you" in the third verse addresses the Prophet (S), then it is clear from the above three verses that the words "he" (the one who frowned) and "you" address two different individuals. The following two verses support this as well:

As for him who considers himself free from need (rich), (Qur'an 80:5)

To him do you address yourself? (Qur'an 80:6)

Thus the one who frowned was other than the Prophet himself due to distinction between "him" and "you". In Verses 80:6 Allah addresses his Prophet (S) saying that preaching arrogant members of Quraish who frown at a blind is not worthy and is not necessary to be preferred over preaching a blind, even though the blind came later. The reason is that preaching anyone who does not intend to purify himself (to the extent that he frowns at a believer) is not fruitful.

Moreover, frowning is not from the manners/descriptions of the Prophet (S) even with his obvious enemies, let alone believers seeking guidance! One may question how can a Prophet (S) who was sent as a mercy to mankind be cruel when an AVERAGE believer does not in such behavior? This allegation is also in contradiction with the announcement of the sublime morals and the ethics of the Holy Prophet (S) by God himself:

"And most certainly you are on sublime morality (exalted standard of character)." (Qur'an, al-Qalam 68:4).

A man who insult others does not deserve such compliments. It is agreed that Chapter al-Qalam (Ch. 68) came before Chapter Abas (Ch. 80). It was even revealed next after Chapter Iqra' (Ch. 96 -- the first revealed chapter). How could it be reasonable that Allah bestow greatness on his creature in the very beginning of his prophethood, declares that he is in the sublime morality, and thereafter reverts to reproach and criticize him on some apparent misgiving in his moral actions.

Also Almighty said:

And warn your near tribe, And be kind to him who follows you of the believers. (Qur'an 26:214-215)

It is well known that these verses are early Meccan revelation. The same words can be found in the tail of verse 15:88. Allah, Exalted He is, furthermore said:

Therefore declare openly what you are bidden and turn aside from the polytheists. (Qur'an 15:94)

He was ordered to turn away from the unbelievers in this verse which is known to have been revealed at the beginning of the "open call to Islam" (after the initial secrecy period).

How could it be imagined that after all these earlier commandments that the great, kind Prophet would err in such a way that would require pronounced interdiction?

The commentators of Qur'an from the school of Ahlul-Bayt further argue that even the questioning in the third and fourth verses of the Chapter concerning the doubt about Abdullah being benefited by the talk with the Holy Prophet (S) or not, has been in the mind of one who had not yet embraced Islam, and was not aware of the spirit of Islam.

This could never have occurred in the mind of the Holy Prophet (S) who has been sent to preach the

faith to every one and all, irrespective of any worldly position of the People. Based on that, they conclude that the word 'you' in the third verse does not still apply to the Prophet, rather it applies to one of the Umayyad attendees, and that none of the first four verses of this chapter (80: 1–4) addresses the Prophet (S) even though the latter verses address the Prophet (S).

Those who are familiar with the language of Qur'an and read the original Arabic Qur'an are aware of the constant jumping between the first, second, and third person writing style of Qur'an. In many verses in Qur'an Allah changes the address sharply, and as such, it is not always easy to figure out who is being addressed when the name of addressee is not mentioned.

That's why the Prophet has ordered us to refer to Ahlul-Bayt (as) for the interpretation of the verses of Qur'an since they are **"firmly grounded in knowledge"**(Qur'an 3:7) and are **"The People of Reminder"**(Qur'an 16:43, 21:7) and they are **the purified people who have touched the meaning of Qur'an (see 56:79)**.

It is narrated that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) said:

It came down regarding a man from the Umayyad; he was at the Prophet's (S) presence, then Ibn Umm-Maktoom came, when he saw him he despised him, withdrew himself, frowned and turned his face away from him. So Allah said what He said in disapproval of his action.

Also it is told that Imam al-Sadiq (as) said:

"Whenever the Messenger of Allah (S) saw Abdullah Ibn Umm-Maktoom, he said: Welcome, welcome, by Allah, you won't find Allah reproaching me in you ever (80:5–11). He used to get kindness from the Prophet so much that he used to avoid from (being in the presence of) the Prophet (S), because of what the Prophet used to do to him." Out of shyness.

In Tafsir of Sayyid Shubbar it is reported from al-Qummi that:

The verse was revealed about Uthman and Ibn Umm-Maktoom, and he was blind. He came to the Messenger of Allah (S), while in the company of companions, and Uthman was there. The Messenger introduced him to Uthman and Uthman frowned and turned his face away.

Allah Almighty said in Qur'an about Prophet Muhammad that:

Nor does he (Muhammad) speak out of his desire. It is nothing but revelation that is revealed. (Qur'an 53:3–4).

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

So how can the Prophet (S) say something offensive if his speeches are revelation or inspiration?! The

Prophet never speaks out of his own desire. Interestingly, Sunnis confirm that Chapter Abas (Ch. 80) was revealed right after Chapter al-Najm (Ch. 53) where it states the Prophet does not speak out of his desire.

Also Verse 33:33 of the Holy Qur'an confirms that Ahlul-Bayt are perfectly pure and flawless. We all know that the virtue of the Prophet was higher than that of his family. He is also counted among Ahlul-Bayt. Then how can he offend a believer and yet maintains PERFECT purity?!

Also note that in the revealed verses Allah states:

And it is not necessary for you (to preach that arrogant chieftain) if he does not purify himself. (Qur'an 80:7)

The above does not mean that what the Prophet did was a mistake, because Allah uses the phrase "it is not necessary for you". This means the Prophet's choice was not wrong, but it was not something necessary to do.

Also when Allah states: Preaching him is not necessary "IF" the Qurashite does not purify himself. Well, the Prophet (S) did not know beforehand that the Qurashite is going to frown at the blind, as such, the "IF" condition has not been satisfied and therefore what the Prophet did was necessary before the time that man frowned (because the Prophet was at the middle of his speech with those Qurashites when the blind man arrived). And as soon as the Qurashite frowned, the Prophet stopped preaching, and the verses were revealed. As we can see, what the Prophet (S) did was his duty second by second.

The reminder was for future, as is the case of another verse of Qur'an where Allah reminds his Prophet that it is not necessary for him to bother himself too much for guiding people since some of them can never be guided, and the Prophet should not be unhappy about those.

In conclusion, we provided evidences from Qur'an, Hadith, History, and Arabic grammar, to support the fact that the very early verses of this chapter do NOT refer to the Prophet Muhammad (S) and the one who frowned at the blind was not the Prophet (S). We also mentioned that Verses 80:5-11 were just a reminder for the future to the Prophet Muhammad that preaching an unbeliever is not fruitful if the unbeliever does not try to purify himself and when the unbeliever offends a believer just because of his lack of wealth and health.

Wassalam.

Shi'i references:

1. al-Mizan, by al-Tabataba'i (Arabic), v20, pp 222-224
2. al-Jawhar al-Thameen fi Tafsir al-Kitab al-Mubeen, by Sayyid Abdullah Shubbar, v6, p363

Side Comments

A Sunni brother mentioned that the scholars of Tafsir wrote the verses of Chapter 80 was revealed after the Prophet was trying to convince the four most powerful people of Quraish to join Islam, namely, Utbah Ibn Rabi'ah, Abu Jahl (Amr Ibn Hisham), Umayyah Ibn Khalaf, and his brother, Ubayy (no mention of Uthman Ibn Affan). Furthermore, al-Qurtubi mentioned in his Tafsir book that these verses are Medaniite (revealed in Medina) meaning that Uthman was already a Muslim by that time.

My response was as follows: Muslims agree that the Chapter Abas (Ch. 80) was revealed in Mecca long before the migration of the Prophet to Medina. More interestingly, they agree that Chapter Abas (Ch. 80) was revealed right after Chapter al-Najm (Ch. 53) where Allah said the Prophet does not speak out of his desire! Again, based on Sunnis, Chapter al-Najm was the 23rd revealed chapter of Qur'an and Chapter Abas was the 24th revealed chapter and both of them were early Meccan revelation.

Perhaps, what al-Qurtubi has mentioned was merely to drift the reader's attention from the issue of Uthman being addressed in the Chapter, and thereby preserving his integrity Uthman with the price of accusing the Prophet (S).

Another bug in the above report is that, you said one of those Qurashite whom the Prophet was talking to, was Abu Jahl. What was Abu Jahl doing in Medina? Do you know, brother, that Abu Jahl lived in Mecca, and was one of the biggest enemies of the Prophet, and never moved to Medina to see the Prophet, and was among those who was killed in the Battle of Badr (the first war).

The other people mentioned in the above report: Utbah and Umayyah were also killed along with their leader, Abu Jahl, in the Battle of Badr. None of them ever had a chance to meet the Prophet (after the migration of the Prophet) except in the battlefield in Badr where their corpse were taken to that famous well!

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/shiite-encyclopedia/who-offended-blind#comment-0>