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Section 6: Noah Exhorts the People to Worship the Only True God

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 105-108

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ نُوحٌ أَلاَ تَتَّقُونَ

إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ

105. "The people of Noah rejected the messengers,"
106. "When their brother Noah said to them: 'Will you not fear (Allah)?"
107. "Verily I am unto you a trustworthy messenger,"
108. "Then be in awe of Allah and obey me."

Noah's name has been repeated forty three times in the Qur'an and Allah has introduced Abraham as from among his party (Shi'ah), where He says:

"And verily of his party was Abraham."1

One of the suras of the Qur'an is entitled Noah. The salutation of Allah unto Noah is a private salutation.

He says:

"Peace be on Noah in (all) the worlds!"2

Allah has also sent salutation to Abraham, Moses and Aaron, but it does not contain the phrase ***/fil-'alamin/*** (***in*** (***all***) ***the worlds***). Studying the history of the Divine prophets causes man to like them and survives the spirit of patience and perseverance in him.

However, next to the end of the story of Abraham and his statements unto those misguided people, as another instructive event, the Holy Qur'an points to the people of Noah and, through a few verses, reiterates their obstinacy, persistence, and shamelessness which led to their painful destiny.

It first says:

"The people of Noah rejected the messengers,"

It is evident that the people of Noah rejected only Noah, but since the invitations of all prophets basically are the same, the rejection of Noah is counted as the rejection of all prophets; that is why the holy Qur'an says the people of Noah rejected 'the messengers'.

It is also probable that principally the people of Noah used to deny all the religions and they rejected absolutely all the Divine prophets whether they were before the advent of Noah or after it.

Then the Qur'an refers to this part of Noah's life which is rather similar to what was formerly mentioned about the life of Moses and Abraham.

It says:

"When their brother Noah said to them: 'Will you not fear (Allah)?"

The application of 'brother' in this verse is a sense which shows the utmost affectionate relationship that is based upon equality. It means, without intending to have any priority over them, Noah invited them to piety with utmost purity and sincerity.

The concept of brotherhood not only has been used for Noah but also it has been applied for many other prophets, (such as Hud, Salih and Lut). This inspires all the leaders of the path of truth that they must observe the utmost love and sincerity in their call while they are far from any self- superiority, so that the annoyed hearts can be attracted by their religion, and no one feels heaviness.

Next to invitation to piety, which is the main factor of any guidance and salvation, he (as) adds:

"Verily I am unto you a trustworthy messenger,"
"Then be in awe of Allah and obey me."

This statement shows that Noah (as) had a long and continued background of honesty among his people and they knew him with this very decent quality, so he says for this reason he is trustworthy in conveying the Divine mission and they would never see any treachery in it.

The Qur'anic phrase ***/'ittaqullah/*** (***be in awe of Allah***) has occurred prior to ***/'ati'un/*** (***obey me***) in order to say that there will not exist any obedience from the messenger of Allah unless there is faith and being in awe of Allah.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 109-111

وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلاَّ عَلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ

قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ لَكَ وَاتَّبَعَكَ الأَرْذَلُونَ

109. "And do not ask you any recompense for it, my recompense is only from the Lord of the worlds."
110. "Then be in awe of Allah and obey me."
111. "They said: 'Shall we believe in you while the meanest follow you?'"

Another time for another reason, Noah (as) resorts to his rightfulness, a reason which makes the tongues of the pretext-seekers blunt when he says:

"And do not ask you any recompense for it, my recompense is only from the Lord of the worlds."

It is clear that the Divine motives are usually taken as the evidence for the truthfulness of the claimant of prophethood, while the material motives evidently show that the aim is gaining profit, and for the Arabs of that time, in particular, this matter was acquainted about the soothsayers and the like.

After this statement, Noah says the same sentence that he said following to the emphasis he laid on his prophecy and his trustworthiness, and said:

"Then be in awe of Allah and obey me."

But when the obstinate pagans and the proud tyrants saw that they had no way to seek pretext, they clung to another matter, as the verse says:

"They said: 'Shall we believe in you while the meanest follow you?'"

The value of a leader can be recognized by his followers, and so to speak, a shrine is known by means of its visitors.

The pagans told Noah that whenever they looked at his followers they saw a group of unusual, poor, miserable, and roguish people, that had some weak and insignificant jobs, who were around him. In that case, how could he expect that the rich, noble men, and famous people, who had some particular ranks and positions in the society, would obey him?

They added that they could never deal with such a group of people, because they had never sat with them at one table and had never gathered with them under one ceiling. What an irrational expectation he had!

It is true that they were right and correct in this matter that a leader can be known by means of his followers, but their great mistake was that they had lost the concept and criterion of personality.

For them, the criterion of measuring the values was property, wealth, beautiful costly clothing, houses, and mounts, and they were neglectful of purity, piety, rightfulness, and some high level standards of humane, which were found abundantly among the poor classes of their society and were very scarce among notable and noble ones.

The worst form of the thought of class division was ruling their ideas, therefore, they counted the poor class of their society 'the roguish level' or 'the meanest level'.

The Arabic word /'ara□il/ is the plural form of /'ar□ul/ which is also the plural form of/ra□l/ that means: 'low and mean'. If they came out of the prison of the social class division they might clearly understand that the belief of this group was the best evidence for the legitimacy and authenticity of the call of that prophet.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 112-113

قَالَ وَمَا عِلْمِي بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

إِنْ حِسَابُهُمْ إِلاَّ عَلَى رَبِّي لَوْ تَشْعُرُونَ

112. "He said: 'No knowledge have I of what they were doing;"
113. "Their reckoning is only on my Lord, if you could (but) perceive;"

In Islam, belevers are to judge according to the apparent situation and if a person embraces Islam we would not have the right to say he has not faith in his heart.

The Qur'an says:

"…and do not say to the one who offers you peace: 'You are not a believer'…"3

In another verse, the Holy Qur'an, addressing the Prophet (S), says:

"And do not repel those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening seeking His countenance. Nothing of their account falls upon you nor anything of your account falls upon them, that you should repel them and thus become of the unjust." 4

This verse indicates that Noah disarmed them by implying that his duty was to call people to the truth and to improve the society, and he did not know what they did in the past.

The verse says:

"He said: 'No knowledge have I of what they were doing;"

What they had done was done, the important thing was their condition at that time whether they answered the prophet's call positively and tried to improve themselves by delivering their heart and their entity to the truth, or not.

Therefore, they should understand that if those believers did a good or bad thing in the past, its reckoning is up to Allah.

The verse says:

"Their reckoning is only on my Lord, if you could (but) perceive;"

It is understood from this statement that, besides poverty, the pagans wanted to accuse that group of the believers to ethical and practical bad record, while corruption and pollution is found in the comfortable people of the society more than other levels. It is those who have all means of mischief in their possession and are proud of their wealth and rank and worship their Lord scarcely.

But, without quarrelling with them about this matter, Noah implies that he does not know anything bad about them, and if there is something, as you say, its account is with Allah.

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara - Verses 114-115

وَمَا أَنَا بِطَارِدِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

إِنْ أَنَا إِلاَّ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ

114. “And I am not going to drive away the believers;”
115. “I am naught but a plain warner.”

For judging about others, the present sincere faith and righteous deeds of them should be dealt with. The past actions of persons must not be shown to them.

The prophet’s mission is to improve people and to invite them to Monotheism. They are not responsible for the deeds of individuals:

“Their reckoning is only on my Lord, if you could (***but***) ***perceive.”***5

Therefore, in this verse, Noah implies that his duty is to be humble for all the seekers of truth.

The verse says:

“And I am not going to drive away the believers;”

This statement is, in fact, an answer to the implicit demand of those wealthy proud people who had demanded Noah to repel and send away those poor people so that they would approach him.

Noah implicitly said that his only duty was to warn people.

The verse says:

“I am naught but a plain warner.”

He who hears this warning of Noah’s and turns back from the deviated path into the Straight Way is his follower, whoever he is and in whatever condition of finance and social conditions he might be.

It is noteworthy that not only Noah, who was an arch prophet, was found fault with this objection, but also the Prophet of Islam (S), who is the seal of the prophets, as well as other prophets were found this fault.

With dark opinion they had, they saw the scenery of those white garmented ones black, and they always demanded him to send them away and to repel them. They said that they disliked the Lord and the prophets who had such servants and followers.

How beautifully the Qur'an says to the Prophet of Islam (S) in Surah Al-Kahf, No. 18, verse 28:

"And keep yourself content with those who call unto their Lord morning and evening seeking His pleasure, and let not your eyes turn, away from them desiring the adornment of the life of the world, and do not obey him whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance and he follows his own low desires, and his affair has become all excess."

Even in our time, this objection is also about the leaders of the Truth, saying that the majority of their adherents are formed by 'the oppressed' and 'the miserable'.

By this statement of theirs, they want to find fault, while unconsciously they praise them and, hereby, they approve their essentiality.

However, everybody must struggle decisively against the undue proposals and expectations of the arrogant ones.

Rejecting the faithful indigents is not permissible, because the criterion of value is faith, not the social and economical rank.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 116-118

قَالُوا لَئِن لَّمْ تَنتَهِ يَا نُوحُ لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمَرْجُومِينَ

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي كَذَّبُونِ

فَافْتَحْ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَهُمْ فَتْحًا وَنَجِّنِي وَمَن مَّعِي مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

116. "They said: 'If you desist not, O Noah! you shall surely be one of the stoned (to death)'."
117. "Said (Noah): 'My Lord! Verily my people have belied me,"
118. "Judge You, then, between me and them, and deliver me and the believers that are with me'."

One of the most important weapons of the prophets' opponents is threat,

(*... you shall surely be one of the stoned* (*to death*)).

The act of stoning is one of the oldest kinds of torture.

Noah's complaint was for people's rejecting the religion, not for the threat of stoning. However, in these holy verses, the Qur'an implies that the response of this misguided obstinate group to Noah (as) was the same thing that all the former tyrants of the world had.

They told Noah to stop his call and if he did not put an end to that kind of words and continued darkening the atmosphere of their society with his bitter speeches, they would certainly stone him to death.

The verse says:

"They said: 'If you desist not, O Noah! you shall surely be one of the stoned* (*to death*)*'."

The application of the Qur'anic phrase: ***/minal marjumin/*** shows that stoning their opponents had been common among them. In fact, they say to Noah that if he continues his call and inviting people to Monotheism and his religion, he will be surely faced with the same thing that their other opponents encountered, i.e. stoning, which is one of the worst kinds of slay.

The Arabic word /rajm/ means stoning someone in a way that he dies.

Noah (as) who sees that this constant sympathetic invitation with that clear logic and suffering patience for a long time has not affected them, except a few, finally he complains to the presence of Allah and, explaining his situation, he asks Him for separation and deliverance from the inimical grips of those irrational cruel people.

The verse says:

"Said* (*Noah*)*: 'My Lord! Verily my people have belied me,"

It is true that Allah is aware of everything, but at the time of complaint and as a preparation for his next request, Noah expressed that statement.

It is noteworthy that Noah did not complain about the afflictions and tragedies he had got, but he was inconvenient only for matter that those people had rejected him and had not accepted the message of Allah.

Then Noah implicitly asks Allah, now that there is no other way to guide this group of people, He may put a separation between him and those people, and then He may judge between them.

The verse says:

"Judge You, then, between me and them…"

The Arabic word /fath/, as some philologists have said, originally means: 'to open' and 'to adjudicate in a cause', and 'removing a shut', which has two forms.

Sometimes it has sensible aspect, like /fathul bab/ (opening the door), and sometimes it has spiritual aspect, like /fathul harnm/ (opening the sorrow and wiping sadness), /fathul mustaqlaq mind 'ulum/ which means revealing the secrets of science, and /fathul qadiyyah/ which means: to judge and put an end to a conflict.

Then Noah adds as follows:

"…and deliver me and the believers that are with me'."

This statement denotes that the believers are inside the prophet's pray, since prophets always pray that the problems of the people and society to be solved.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 119-122

فَأَنجَيْنَاهُ وَمَن مَّعَهُ فِي الْفُلْكِ الْمَشْحُونِ

ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا بَعْدُ الْبَاقِينَ

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

119. "So We delivered him, and those with him, in the laden Ark."
120. "Then We drowned the rest afterwards."
121. "Verily in that is a sign, but most of them do not believe."
122. "And verily your Lord, He is the Mighty, the Merciful."

The invocation of the prophets and that of the oppressed are accepted.

The story of the deliverance of Noah and his followers, while their opponents and disbelievers were drowned, is an example for Allah's way of treatment due to helping the right and defeating wrong.

The objective of the Qur'anic phrase ***/alfulkil mašhun/*** is that Noah (as) put whatever was needed in the Ark.

Imam Baqir (as) says:

"/***alfulkil mašhun/*** *is an equipped ship which is ready to start*."

Ali (as) said:

"There were 90 places built in that ship (*Noah's Ark*) *for the animals."*6

However, the grace of Allah came to help Noah and, on the other hand, His painful punishment came to annihilate the rejecters, as the Qur'an says:

"So We delivered him, and those with him, in the laden Ark."
"Then We drowned the rest afterwards."

The Arabic word /mašhun/ is derived from /šahn/ which means 'to fill', and sometimes it has been used in the sense of 'to equip'. The Arabic word /šahna'/ is used for the means and tools which fill all parts of a person, and the purpose here is that the Ark was full of individuals and all means so that there was not any deficiency.

That is, when the Ark was completely ready to move, Allah sent the flood and there was no worriness for Noah and those who embarked the Ark with him. This was one of the favours of Allah over them.

At the end of this explanation, the Qur'an repeats the same words which were mentioned at the end of the stories of Moses (as) and Abraham (as). It implies that in the circumstance of the event of Noah and his constant invitation to the truth, his patience, and, finally, the destiny of his opponents who were drowned and destroyed, there is a sign for all mankind.

The verse says:

"Verily in that is a sign, but most of them do not believe."

Therefore, the Prophet (S) should not be upset from the aversion and obstinacy of the pagans among his people; he must persevere for his destiny and that of his companions for it is like the destiny of Noah and his followers, and the fate of the disbelievers is the same fate that those drowned people had.

Then, the verses says:

"And verily your Lord, He is the Mighty, the Merciful."

His Mercy requires that He gives them chance and respites them with enough time and completes the argument; and His Might causes you, at last, to be victorious and to make them encounter defeat.

Thus, if He gives respite to the disbelievers, it is because of His Mercy, not for the existence of any weakness.

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1. Surah As-Saffat, No. 37, verse 83
2. Ibid, verse 79
3. Surah An-Nisa', No. 4, verse 94
4. Surah Al-'An'am, NO. 6, verse 52
5. The current Surah, verse 113
6. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, the Commentary

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