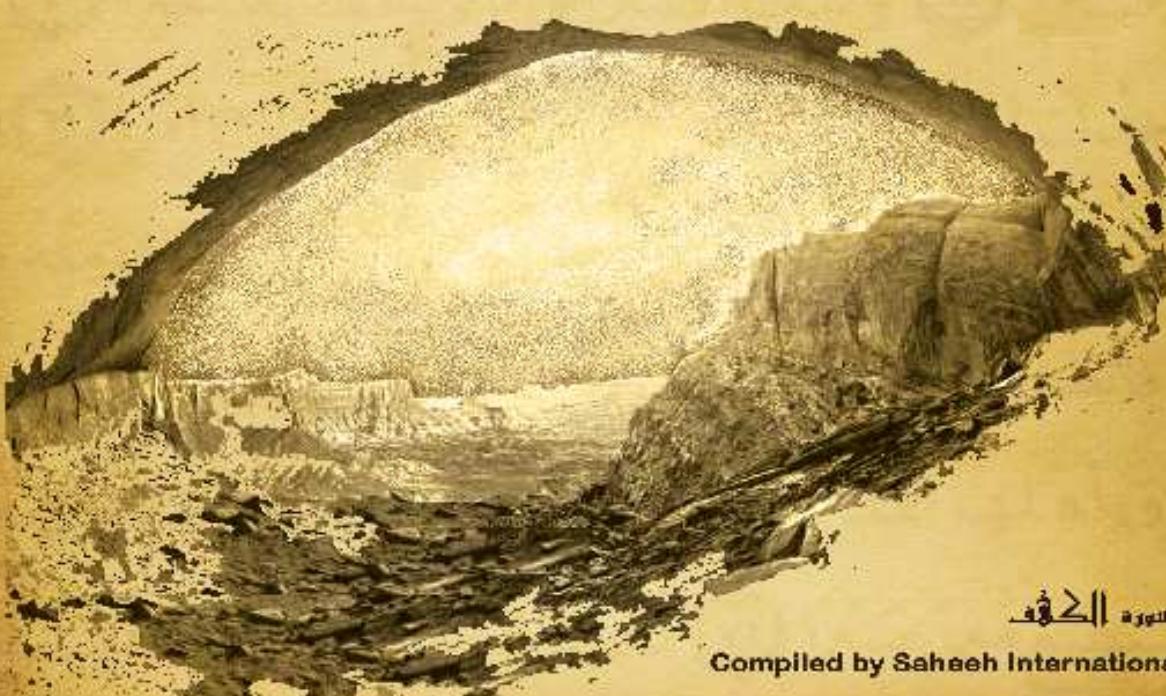


Surah Al-Kahf



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Sūrah al-Kahf

Introduction

Sūrah al-Kahf was revealed in Makkah and takes its name from *Āyah* no. 9 in which the word "al-kahf" (the cave) occurs. It is one of five *sūrahs*¹ which begins with *al-hamdu lillāh* (all praise is due to Allāh) and has been described by the scholars as a source of guiding principles, instructive ethics and a foundation for sound belief. The *sūrah*'s distinguishing feature is its historic narratives, sent down by the Lord of mankind to establish truth and to correct beliefs. Allāh affirmed to His Messenger (ﷺ):

وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ مِنْ الْكِتَابِ هُوَ الْحَقُّ

"And that which We have inspired to you of the Book [i.e., the Qur'ān] is the truth."²

The first verses of the *sūrah* state the purpose of the Qur'ān's revelation. They are followed by the stories of *ashāb al-kahf* (the companions of the cave) and the owner of two gardens, then a brief reference to the story of Adam and Iblees, the account of Prophet Mūsā with *Khidhr*, and the narrative about Dhul-Qarnayn. The *sūrah* ends with a conclusion containing warning, reassurance and instruction. There is emphasis throughout on *tawheed* and denunciation of those who make claims without knowledge or evidence.

Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) encouraged learning and reciting portions of this *sūrah* to keep believers safe from one of the major trials preceding the Last Hour. He said, "Whoever memorizes the first ten verses of Sūrah al-Kahf will be protected from the Dajjāl." Another narration mentions the same for ten verses at the end of Sūrah al-Kahf.³ Appropriately, the *sūrah*'s narratives deal with the kinds of *fitnah* (trials, temptations and deceptions) that will appear with the coming of the Dajjāl near the end of time.

There are several other sound *hadīths* concerning benefits of reciting or reading *Sūrah al-Kahf* during the day or the eve of Jumu'ah (Friday). They include:

"Whoever recites Sūrah al-Kahf on the eve of Jumu'ah will have a light extending between himself and the Ancient House [i.e., the Ka'bāh]."⁴

"Whoever recites Sūrah al-Kahf on the day of Jumu'ah will have a light shining from him from that Friday to the next."⁵

¹The others being *al-Fātiḥah*, *al-An'ām*, *Saba'* and *Fāṭir*.

²*Sūrah Fāṭir*, 35:31.

³Both were narrated by Muslim.

⁴Narrated by ad-Dārimī – ḥaṣeeḥ.

⁵Narrated by al-Hākim and al-Bayhaqī – ḥaṣeeḥ.

So the *sūrah* may be read or recited during the night before or the day of Jumu‘ah. The eve of Jumu‘ah starts from sunset on Thursday, and the day of Jumu‘ah ends at sunset. So the time for reciting it extends from sunset of Thursday to sunset of Friday.

The Prophet's recommendations to memorize and recite this *sūrah* weekly are an indication of its importance. Among the reasons he recommended reciting *al-Kahf* is that it contains several reminders of the end of the world. At a time near the Last Hour, systems of unbelief and falsehood will become widespread and menacing, but believers are assured that truth and justice will ultimately prevail.

Background

Sūrah al-Kahf was revealed in the fifth year of prophethood, prior to the *Hijrah*. Although the pagans of Makkah had constantly been ridiculing, threatening and spreading false propaganda against the Prophet (ﷺ), the numbers of his followers were continuing to increase. At this point in time, leaders of the Quraysh had also begun to adopt various methods of persecution and economic pressure in a serious effort to put an end to the "new" religion which they saw as a threat to their long-established authority and prestige within and beyond the Arabian Peninsula.

A substantial number of Muslims had sought refuge in Abyssinia, and those who remained in Makkah were being subjected to even greater difficulties. Along with the Prophet and his family, Muslim believers were forcibly confined to the area of Shi‘b Abī Tālib, where a complete social and economic boycott was applied against them for nearly three years. Soon after the boycott was lifted, Khadījah, the Prophet's wife, and Abū Tālib, the uncle whose personal influence had been a protecting shield, both passed away. Thereafter, the persecution of Muslims increased to a critical degree. *Sūrah al-Kahf* was sent down by Allāh, the Most Merciful, bringing comfort and encouragement to the oppressed believers.⁶

The *Seerah*⁷ of Ibn Ishāq contains the following report by Ibn ‘Abbās: The Quraysh sent an-Nadr bin al-Hārith and ‘Uqbah bin Abī Mu‘ayṭ to the Jewish scholars in Madīnah⁸ with the instruction: "Ask them about Muḥammad; describe him to them and tell them what he says. They are people of the first scripture, and they have knowledge about the prophets which we do not have."

⁶*Sūrah al-Kahf* also provides comfort to Muslims of the present age who are experiencing a relentless war on Islām and whose faith in Allāh is being severely tested. It assures them that the long period of immorality, falsehood, deception, oppression and massacre will eventually and ultimately give way to the triumph of truth and justice.

⁷Biography of the Prophet (ﷺ).

⁸Known then as Yathrib.

So they journeyed until they reached Madīnah and asked the Jewish scholars about the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), describing to them the issue concerning him and some of what he had said, adding, "You are people of the Torah, and we have come to you to inform us about the man among us." They said, "Ask him about three things which we will tell you, and if he can inform you of them, then he is a prophet who was sent; otherwise, he is a man who fabricates speech and you can decide what to do with him. Ask him about the affair of some youths from early times, for indeed, theirs was a strange story. And ask him about the news of a man who traveled afar, reaching the eastern and western regions of the earth. And ask him about the soul – what it is. If he can answer you, then he is a prophet, so follow him; and if not, he is a man who fabricates speech, so do with him whatever you see fit."

An-Nadhr and ‘Uqbah returned to the Quraysh and said, "O people of Quraysh, we have brought you the means of decision on the matter between yourselves and Muḥammad. The Jewish scholars told us to ask him about three things," and they related them. So the leaders went to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) and said, "O Muḥammad, inform us," and they asked him what they had been told. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) expected that his Lord would reveal the answers they sought, so he replied, "I will tell you about what you asked tomorrow" but did not add, "*In shā’ Allāh*." Then they left him.

The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) remained for fifteen nights during which time Allāh revealed to him nothing about it, nor did Jibreel come to him. Talk was spreading among the people of Makkah. They said, "Muḥammad promised us the next day and today is the fifteenth day, while he has not told us anything about what we asked him." The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) was saddened that the revelation had been withheld from him and was distressed by what the people of Makkah were saying.

Then Jibreel came to him from Allāh with *Sūrah al-Kahf*, which expressed disapproval of his sorrow regarding them and provided the information they had requested about the youths and the man who traveled afar. And [Jibreel conveyed] Allāh's words:

وَسَأَلُوكُمْ عَنِ الرُّوحِ كُلِّ الرُّوحٍ مِّنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّيِّ وَمَا أُوتِيْتُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

"And they ask you about the soul. Say, 'The soul is of the affair of my Lord, and you, [mankind], have not been given of knowledge except a little.'"⁹

Sūrah al-Kahf was revealed in response to the questions posed by the polytheists of Makkah to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) which were meant to be a test of whether or not he actually had knowledge of things unseen. While the third question was answered concisely in a single āyah of *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, the first two

⁹*Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:85.

concerned the history of the Jews and Christians and involved certain facts which were generally unknown in the *Hijāz* at that time. Allāh provided detailed answers to them in such a way as to discredit the opponents' claims as well as conveying the message that before long the Qur'ān would expose and correct all the falsehoods that had spread among people due to the corruption of previous scriptures.

Narratives about past nations provide lessons and guidance in a variety of ways. The story of *aṣḥāb al-kahf* deals with the struggle of believers and their sacrifice of worldly comforts in order to safeguard their '*aqeedah*' and practice the religion ordained by Allāh. It points out that those young men who sought refuge in the cave believed in the same doctrine of *tawheed* which was being imparted by Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) and that their condition was quite similar to that of the oppressed Muslims in Makkah. In this story the disbelievers are presented with evidence of the Hereafter and warned that Allāh, the Almighty, easily has power to restore life, even after many long years of lifelessness. In addition, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) is instructed not to compromise with the persecutors, and the disbelieving chiefs are advised not to be deceived by the transitory life they enjoyed in this world but to look beyond it to the permanent benefits of the Hereafter.

Similarly, the additional account of Mūsā and Khidhr served to give comfort and instruction to the Muslims. They are counseled therein to keep faith in the wisdom behind the divine will even when its rationale is unapparent to them. There is also reference to unassuming conduct, modesty and patience when seeking knowledge.

The same is true of the story of Dhul-Qarnayn. Related in answer to the demand of the disbelievers, it points out to the arrogant questioners that unlike themselves, Dhul-Qarnayn, while being an impressive ruler, a powerful conqueror and a possessor of vast resources, was always just, modest and obedient to his Creator. And whereas he had succeeded in constructing the most durable barrier possible, he acknowledged that it could only protect the people from their enemies as long as Allāh should will.

These narratives are used in the Qur'ān to illustrate that truth and righteousness are not related to wealth, position or authority but only to what has been commanded by Allāh. And three additional examples are included in the *sūrah* with the same objective. First is that of the proud, self-deluded owner of the two gardens and in contrast, his companion, whose pride and self-respect lay in his relationship with his Lord. Second, the temporary nature of worldly life is represented by the brief existence of plant life in desert land after a rain. And third, the arrogant refusal of Iblees to obey Allāh is what caused him to be expelled from His mercy and deprived of all benefit.

… Āyah 1 …

الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلٰی عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَاجِمًا

[All] praise is [due] to Allāh, who has sent down upon His Servant [Muhammad] the Book and has not made therein any deviance.¹⁰

Allāh, the Exalted, begins by praising Himself for conveying the Qur’ān through His chosen Messenger (ﷺ) in order to benefit humanity. The Book of Allāh, His greatest favor to mankind, is in itself sufficient reason for praising Him, and while He praises Himself in the most perfect way as befitting His majesty,¹¹ believers are reminded to be thankful to Him as well.

However, praise is a concept more comprehensive than gratitude for a specific blessing. It additionally includes recognition of the Creator's perfect attributes, and thus is due to Him at all times and under all circumstances. In Arabic, addition of the definite article imparts the meaning of "all praise" and "all kinds of praise." And in reality, Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, is the only being worthy to praise Himself.

The sūrah's opening statement also establishes the unambiguous and non-contradictory nature of the Qur’ān and declares that it is free from all obscurities and internal contradictions. The implication is that this is no longer true of the previously revealed divine scriptures, since over time they had been corrupted by man. As promised within it,¹² the final Book of Allāh remains to this day exactly as it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and will remain so until the end of time.

… Āyahs 2-3 …

قِيمًا لِّيُنذِرَ بَاسًا شَدِيدًا مِّنْ لَدُنْهُ وَيُبَشِّرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا

مَكِثِينَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا

[He has made it] straight, to warn of severe punishment from Him and to give good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a good reward, remaining therein forever.

Further emphasis is given to the straight, uncorrupted, direct and upright nature of the final revelation, and its purpose is then clarified. Three basic functions of the Qur’ān are mentioned. First, straightening and correcting what

¹⁰Literally, "crookedness," meaning diversion and deviation from the truth or from the straight path.

¹¹The Prophet (ﷺ) concluded a supplication by saying, "I cannot adequately praise You; You are as You have praised Yourself." (Narrated by Muslim)

¹²Refer to 15:9.

had been altered in previous scriptures. Second, warning those who reject its truth and prefer instead to cling to remnants of those divine scriptures which are mixed with the writings of men. For they do so only out of attachment to revered traditions and acceptance among their peoples, disregarding the evidences presented to them by Allāh in the Qur’ān. “**Severe punishment**” includes the calamities of this world as well as torment of the Hellfire. And third, giving good tidings of great reward to the believers who do righteous deeds in obedience to their Creator. That reward is no less than the blissful gardens of Paradise, in which they will dwell eternally.

… Āyahs 4-5 …

وَيُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا أَخْنَدَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا ﴿٤﴾ مَا هُم بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلَا لِأَبَاهِمْ كَبُرُتْ كَلِمَةٌ تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ إِنْ يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا ﴿٥﴾

And to warn those who say, "Allāh has taken a son." They have no knowledge of it, nor had their fathers. Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths; they speak not except a lie.

The Qur’ān was also sent down to warn all those who claim that Allāh has taken for Himself a son.¹³ This verse is an undeniable rejection of Christian claims about Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus ﷺ) and states that lack of knowledge is what has led people to accept and pass on that falsehood generation after generation. They have no evidence of what they claim; and obviously, they could not have had evidence or knowledge of something which is not true.

Ibn Ishāq was of the opinion that *walad* means “child” rather than “son” and that the *āyah* was referring to the pagan Arabs who worshiped angels as “daughters of Allāh.” Commentators have suggested that in either case, the blasphemy uttered by them is a form of disbelief which has been given separate mention in this *sūrah* due to its particularly improper and offensive nature – over and beyond its untruth.

… Āyah 6 …

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَتَخُّعُ نَفْسَكَ عَلَىٰ إِثْرِهِمْ إِنْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسْفًا ﴿٦﴾

Then perhaps you would destroy yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.

The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) was deeply saddened over the refusal of his people to accept Islam. It is indicated to him here that this should not be the

¹³An even more distasteful claim made by some Christians is the one mentioned in 37:152 that He (ﷻ) had “begotten” a son.

case. For their generous Lord had granted them all they desired of worldly blessings: properties, wealth and children, yet they persisted in ingratitude by worshipping other than Him. And while there were some who would respond favorably to the message of the Qur’ān, there were many others whose internal corruption was such that they could not be reached. Those would respond with negative obstinacy and arrogant opposition to truth and reform, and such people are undeserving of sympathy. While containing a gentle criticism, the *āyah* also served to comfort the Prophet (ﷺ) and reassure him that he had not fallen short in his duty. As stated throughout the Qur’ān, he was responsible only for conveying the message, while its implementation is the duty of those who have heard it or known of it.

Similarly, believers are reminded that it is Allāh who grants faith to whom He wills according to that person's moral fiber and attitude toward His revealed message. And like the Messenger (ﷺ), believers are only responsible for inviting people to religion in the best manner possible. After that the outcome must be understood as emanating from the absolute wisdom and justice of Allāh.

… Āyah 7 …

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُو هُمْ أَيْمَنُهُمْ أَحَسَنُ عَمَلاً

Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them [as to] which of them is best in deed.

In the words of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ): “*The world is beautiful and green.*¹⁴” Allāh willed that every attractive and enjoyable thing on the earth would be for human beings a means by which He tests them in order to make known which of them are best in deeds and conduct. Indeed, circumstances of ease and prosperity can be the most subtle and difficult of tests when taken for granted. The trials of the present life serve to confirm for every soul at the time of Judgment the justice of the destiny Allāh has decreed for it. For the Creator does not place anyone in Paradise or Hell on account of what He knew about him before his birth. Rather, every individual is given a chance to prove to himself what he deserves in relation to the free and deliberate decisions and actions taken by him during the life on earth. And in the *Shari‘ah* of Islam, accountability is in direct proportion to ability.

Some may be aware of this truth but disregard it due to the fact that they are deeply involved in worldly affairs and do not wish to think about death or consider the restoration of moral balance in the Hereafter. However, Allāh has warned:

أَحَسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتَرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا إِنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ . وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ

¹⁴Narrated by at-Ṭabarānī – ṣaheeh.

فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَذَّابِينَ

"Do the people think that they will be left to say: 'We believe,' and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allāh will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars."¹⁵"

And He described Himself as:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوْكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحَسَنُ عَمَلاً وَهُوَ أَعْزَى الرَّغْفُورُ

"The one who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed; and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving."¹⁶

So it is most unwise to be misled by the temporary pleasures of this life. In fact, believers must expect this world to become increasingly attractive with an increase in tests and trials as the end of time approaches.¹⁷ On the other hand, one may rest assured that the apparent prosperity and affluence enjoyed by unbelievers, criminals and enemies of Islam is in no way a sign that their Lord is pleased with them. On the contrary, their test is of a more subtle nature, unrecognized by them in their heedlessness.¹⁸ Lack of gratitude for the countless blessings bestowed on them is, in effect, denial of their Creator, Provider and Sustainer.

The prophets and messengers were the most severely tested of mankind and suffered the most hardships. But because He loved them, Allāh enabled them to earn great rewards through those additional difficulties. Al-Hasan al-Baṣrī said, "Do not dislike the trials that befall you or the disasters that happen to you, for there may be something you hate but it leads to your salvation, and there may be something you love but it leads to your destruction."

Because the world is green and beautiful it deceives people, but those who enjoy its pleasures cannot carry them into the next life; there they will find only the account of their deeds and the results of their test.

¹⁵Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt, 29:2-3.

¹⁶Sūrah al-Mulk, 67:2.

¹⁷Nowhere is its attraction more intense than in the modern scientific and technological developments which have brought tremendous changes in the way man lives, travels, communicates, etc. The primary reasons behind refusal of religion are almost always excessive, blind attachment to the worldly life and false pride in what one regards as his own achievements. The overwhelming majority of humanity has already been seduced by the *dunyā* and infected with the materialism and moral corruption that result from leaving the path of Allāh.

¹⁸It has been pointed out that trials of hardship and poverty often have a greater measure of success as one remains attached to Allāh while in need of help and tends to forget Him once all is well.

… Āyah 8 …

وَإِنَّا لَجَعَلْنَاهُ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا

And indeed, We will make that which is upon it [into] a barren ground.

The present world was not created to be an eternal abode and will eventually come to an end.¹⁹ And since this life is but a test, Allāh will in time reduce everything on the earth to parched dust, alluding to its temporary and worthless nature. And even before that time, whenever He should will, Allāh can do away with all the treasured things that make people forget His existence, leaving them helpless and destitute.

Hence, the *sūrah*'s narratives serve to bring attention to some of the trials of worldly life and the proper way to deal with them. The youths who sought refuge in the cave were facing a test of their religion. They found it necessary to sacrifice something of this world in order to achieve eternal happiness. The owner of the two gardens was tested by means of wealth and children. His failure in that test and the advice of his companion indicate what the appropriate conduct should have been. Prophet Mūsā was tested with the gift of knowledge. His initial error led him to seek the company of one more knowledgeable than himself and to understand that things are not always as they seem. And Dhul-Qarnayn was tested by being granted great power and authority. He demonstrated the high degree of morality expected by Allāh from those in such positions.

… Āyah 9 …

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَآلَّرَقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ إِيمَانِنَا عَجَبًا

Or have you thought that the companions of the cave and the inscription²⁰ were, among Our signs, a wonder?

The Prophet (ﷺ) was reminded that the story of *ashāb al-kahf* is but one of the many wonders of Allāh, although not the most amazing of them. In fact, as Ibn Katheer has pointed out, the creation of the heavens and the earth, the subjugation of the sun and moon, and the evidences provided to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) are all greater signs of Allāh's ability than this particular occurrence. However, as stated previously, it was related for a purpose.

¹⁹Ibn ‘Abbās explained that everything on the earth will be wiped out and destroyed. Mujāhid and Qatādah added, "[It will be] a plain with no trees on it nor vegetation."

²⁰Several among the *ṣahābah* and *tābi‘een* were of the opinion that *ar-Raqeem* referred to a valley near Jerusalem or a mountain, while others believed it was a stone tablet or a book. The view preferred by Ibn Katheer and most other scholars is that it is something inscribed, possibly the scripture that was in possession of the youths.

There were some youths of an earlier time²¹ who had faith in Allāh and preserved it by withdrawing from the ungodly world that had declared war upon them and their religious way of life. The persecutors of those youths had oppressed them as the disbelievers of Quraysh were doing to their own Muslim citizens. Those young men survived by holding fast to their divine scriptures and removing themselves from the corrupted environment of *fitnah*. Guided by Allāh, they embarked upon a *hijrah* to escape the pressure of a hostile disbelieving establishment.

... Āyah 10 ...

إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا مَنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةٌ وَهِيَ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا ﴿١٠﴾

[Mention] when the youths retreated to the cave and said, "Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance."

Times of *fitnah* and hardship serve to distinguish true believers from others. The believing youths preferred to leave their homes, families, friends, pleasures and comforts rather than compromise their faith. They sought refuge in a distant, secluded cave from the oppressive system of government which would not allow them to express their views, speak the truth or invite people to the path of Allāh.²² There they were free to address their Lord, supplicate and worship Him.

The young men invoked their Lord and relied on Him for guidance in this most difficult situation. Everyone is dependent upon Allāh at every moment, and no one can achieve anything through his own effort or ability unless his Lord should will it. In addition to physical efforts, *du‘aa'* (supplication) is a means by which to seek the assistance of Allāh, the Almighty, to draw near to Him and obtain His mercy. The youths sought to overcome their weakness through His power, their vulnerability through His protection, and their deprivation through His mercy.

The "mercy" requested in their *du‘aa'* has been explained by commentators as concealment from the enemies searching for them. This was undoubtedly their most immediate need; yet their Lord was well aware of all the problems that would surely face them sooner or later. "**Right guidance**" is that which leads to the best outcome. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) would often supplicate for the best outcome in all affairs.

²¹Historians place the period of this event as sometime after the prophethood of ‘Isā (peace be upon him). It should be noted that what is known about the inhabitants of the cave has been mentioned in this *sūrah*. Nothing has come down to us in any sound *hadīth* from the Prophet (ﷺ). Most of the names, places and other details cited by various commentators are taken from Jewish and Christian sources, which may or may not be accurate.

²²How many Muslims today would wish to be like the youths in this story; on the other hand, how many would readily reduce or cease the practice of their religion in order to be accepted in a godless world.

… Āyahs 11-12 …

فَضَرَبَنَا عَلَىٰ إِذَا نَهَمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَادًا ۝ ثُمَّ بَعْثَنَاهُمْ لِتَعْلَمَ أَئِ الْحَزَبَيْنِ أَحْصَى لِمَا لَيْشُوا

أَمَدًا ۝

So We cast [a cover of sleep] over their ears within the cave for a number of years. Then We awakened them that We might show which of the two factions was most precise in calculating what [extent] they had remained in time.

When the youths supplicated to Allāh after taking refuge in the cave, He covered them with His mercy and put them to sleep for a long period of time, disabling their hearing to prevent them from awakening.²³ Thus, they were spared oppression, injustice, persecution and even verbal abuse.

After several generations the oppressive regime from which they had fled was replaced by others who believed in Allāh and hence, the danger for them had passed. Allāh then revived the sleeping youths as a sign to the people of that time, as well as to make evident the truth to those of them who differed over the period they had remained in the cave.

… Āyah 13 …

۝ خَنُّ تَقْصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأُهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ إِذَا مَنَوْا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَهُمْ هُدًى

We will relate to you, [O Muḥammad], their story in truth. Indeed, they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance.

After the introductory summary of previous verses, Allāh (ﷻ) begins narration of the story in more detail. Facts presented by Allāh in the Qur’ān are precise truth, and His narration is undeniably the correct one by which all other information may be judged for accuracy. The youths in this story are cited by Allāh as examples for others who endure religious persecution. For every step a believer takes toward defense and preservation of truth and upright conduct results in a divine response which increases his faith and ability to resist the pressures and demands of his opponents.

This verse is one of the many throughout the Qur’ān in which Allāh, the Exalted, affirms the cause and effect relationship, not only with reference to the physical universe, but also pertaining to interaction between Himself and His servants. Through His prophets and messengers, Allāh (ﷻ) imparts information,

²³During sleep all the senses become oblivious to the outside world except for hearing. For this reason one may be awakened by sounds such as a voice or alarm.

evidences and right guidance. Some among the recipients deny or ignore His message, and some accept and follow it. Those who close their eyes to it are left to what they have chosen and thus are not guided, while those who apply the guidance they receive and confirm their belief through obedience and worship are strengthened in faith and granted further guidance. As Allah said:

وَالَّذِينَ آهَتَدُوا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى وَءَاتَنَاهُمْ تَقْوَاهُمْ

"And those who follow guidance, He increases them in guidance and gives them their taqwā."²⁴

Such was the case of the believing youths who were to become known as *ashāb al-kahf*.

Allāh mentions here that they were young men. Ibn Katheer commented: "Youths are more receptive of truth and more prone to guidance than elders who have become overbearing and absorbed in a religion of falsehood. That is why most of those who responded to Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ) were young people, whereas most elders of the Quraysh remained attached to their religion and did not accept Islam except for a few."

... Āyah 14 ...

وَرَأَطَنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّ الْسَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَن نَدْعُوَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهًا لَّكَذْ
فُلِّنَا إِذَا شَطَطْنَا

And We bound [i.e., made firm] their hearts when they stood up and said, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Never will we invoke besides Him any deity. We would have certainly spoken, then, an excessive transgression."

The young believers were in a vulnerable position, but they took a courageous stand. They perceived that any acceptance of *shirk* would result in the destruction of their faith, so they steadfastly resisted it. In appreciation of their effort and in answer to their supplication, Allāh (ﷻ) strengthened their hearts with patience, determination and willpower.

"They stood up" decisively and firmly for *tawheed* and were not intimidated by the threats against them. While forms of *shirk* exist in every age, people often have difficulty recognizing them.²⁵ These youths had become

²⁴Sūrah Muhammad, 47:17. *Taqwā* has been defined as righteousness, piety, fear or consciousness of Allāh, and care to avoid His displeasure.

²⁵For example, very few recognize the *shirk* of the modern secular state when it declares its authority and laws to be supreme, or the *shirk* of obedience to customs, political ideologies or one's own inclinations instead of obedience to Allāh. Muslims are required to distance themselves from *shirk* in all its forms.

aware that their society was committing acts of major *shirk* by worshipping and invoking manmade deities.²⁶ They declared outright that they would never call upon any other than Allāh, adding that to do so would be clear ingratitude and sinful transgression against their Creator, the Lord of the worlds.

Supplication is among the most important forms of worship and is evidence of belief in the power and ability of the one worshipped. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "*It is du‘aa’ [supplication] which is worship.*"²⁷ Because He controls the universe and whatever it contains, Allāh alone is the source of all benefit and harm. That is why His Messenger (ﷺ) instructed, "*When you ask, ask Allāh; and when you seek help, seek it from Allāh.*"²⁸ This is what was done by the young men, so their Lord aided and protected them when they were confronted by their tyrannical ruler and his establishment.

... Āyah 15 ...

هَوْلَاءِ قَوْمُنَا أَخْنَدُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهًا لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ بُشْرَىٰ بَيْنَ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ أَفْتَرَى

عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا

These, our people, have taken besides Him deities. Why do they not bring for [worship of] them a clear evidence? And who is more unjust than one who invents about Allāh a lie.

Commentators have stated that most likely, the young men did not know one another until Allāh brought them together after He had implanted faith in their hearts. Once they became conscious that the prayers and sacrifices being offered to idols should only be directed to Allāh, their Creator and Sustainer, they withdrew from the public gatherings and refused to participate in those acts of *shirk*. Instead, each of them retired to the shade of a distant tree, and upon realization that they had all come to that spot for the same reason, they became brothers in faith.

The young men began to gather at a particular place to worship Allāh, but the polytheistic people found out and reported it to their king, who ordered them to appear before him. When asked about their beliefs, they spoke the truth and invited him to Allāh with the words of this verse: "**These, our people, have taken besides Him deities. Why do they not bring for [worship of] them a clear evidence? And who is more unjust than one who invents about Allāh a lie.**"

²⁶Followers of other religions have violated this aspect of *tawheed* by praying to other than Allāh. And there are people who try to justify their invocations to idols or "saints" with the excuse that they intercede for them with Allāh. The Qur’ān emphasizes throughout that such practices are totally unacceptable.

²⁷Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhī – *ṣaheeh*.

²⁸Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhī – *ṣaheeh*.

The youths reasoned that since *tawheed* is established by logical proofs, none could be more misguided and unreasonable than a person who fabricates such untruths as the claim that Allāh has partners, that He accepts the worship of idols, or that they can act as intercessors. They had rejected their people's custom of idol worship because they were not given any reasonable justification for it. The Qur'ān declares *shirk* to be great injustice because it is based completely on falsehood.

... Āyah 16 ...

وَإِذْ أَعْتَلْتُمُوهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَأَوْدُوا إِلَى الْكَهْفِ يَنْشُرُ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُم مِّنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيُهِيئَ لَكُم مِّنْ

أَمْرِكُمْ مِرْفَقًا ﴿١٦﴾

[The youths said to one another], "And when you have withdrawn from them and that which they worship other than Allāh, retreat to the cave. Your Lord will spread for you of His mercy and will prepare for you from your affair facility."

It is related that when they invited the king to acknowledge and worship Allāh, he angrily refused and threatened them with dire consequences unless they returned to their former religion. He then gave them a brief period to think the matter over, and this was a mercy from Allāh, for during that time they managed to escape.

Once they had disconnected from their society's corruption and *shirk* and departed, Allāh directed the young believers to take refuge in a cave, promising to extend His mercy to them and expand it, to resolve their difficulties and give them comfort and ease. Allāh enabled them to escape and then concealed them in the cave so that the king and his agents would not find any trace of them or any information. Ibn Katheer added, "In the same way, Allāh concealed Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his companion, Abū Bakr, when they took cover in the cave of Thawr at the beginning of their *hijrah*. It is prescribed during times of trial and persecution for one who fears for his religion to escape from his persecutors."²⁹

Al-Qurṭubī explains Allāh's words, "**retreat to the cave**" by saying, "This is an order for *hijrah* or for isolating oneself from society during times of severe *fitnah*... People's circumstances differ; some may have the stamina to reside in caves, but for others seclusion in the home is less demanding. Some of those who had fought in the battle of Badr confined themselves to their houses after the murder of 'Uthmān and did not come out except to their graves. But perhaps someone with a measure of strength could continue to live among the people and bear their abuse while detaching his heart and opposing them privately. And Allāh is the protector and grantor of success."

²⁹Assuming it is possible.

At times of extreme opposition by the authorities to religious practices and values, it can be prudent for believers to distance themselves in order to meet with less hostility and gain greater opportunities for personal development, increasing in knowledge and engaging in beneficial work. Otherwise, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) has said, "*The believer who mixes with the people and is patient with their abuse is better than the believer who does not mix with the people and is not patient with their abuse.*"³⁰

... Āyah 17 ...

وَتَرَى الْشَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَعَتْ تَزَوُّرٌ عَنْ كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَتْ تَقْرِضُهُمْ ذَاتَ السِّمَاءِ وَهُمْ فِي فَجُوَّةٍ مِّنْهُ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهَتَّدُ وَمَنْ يُضْلَلْ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُ وَلِيًّا مُّرْشِدًا ﴿١٧﴾

And [had you been present], you would see the sun when it rose, inclining away from their cave on the right, and when it set, passing away from them on the left, while they were [laying] within an open space thereof. That was from the signs of Allāh. He whom Allāh guides is the [rightly] guided, but he whom He sends astray – never will you find for him a protecting guide.

The prolonged slumber of the young men was an amazing sign from Allāh for those whom He willed to be guided. They lay in a spacious area inside the cave which allowed air to circulate and where the sun's heat could not cause damage to their bodies. Imām Mālik mentioned the observation of Ibn ‘Abbās that the sun entered the cave without touching them, for if it had touched them, it would have burned their bodies and clothes.

The Qur’ānic description of this scene is of utmost precision, conveying that rays of the sun entered the mouth of the cave by early morning and late afternoon, but not while it was directly overhead. Several early scholars noted that this indicates the cave's opening was to the north. Ibn Katheer explained, "If the entrance of the cave had faced east, nothing could have entered it near sunset, and if it had faced the *Qiblah* [i.e., south], nothing could have entered it after sunrise or before sunset, and the shade would not have slanted to the right or the left. If it had faced west, nothing could have entered it at the time of sunrise until after the sun had passed its zenith, it and would then have remained until sunset. Allāh, the Exalted, informed us of this and intended that we understand and contemplate it. But He did not tell us the location of this cave or in which country on earth it was. If there had been any religious benefit in that, Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ) would have directed us to it."

"That was from the signs of Allāh." Among His signs was that He guided the youths to this cave in order to keep them alive for a specific purpose, and He caused the sunlight and air to enter it in a determined measure for the

³⁰Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥīḥ.

preservation of their bodies. It was evidence of their Lord's plan and of His care for them, and a sign of response to their supplications for mercy and guidance. For this reason the verse concludes: "**He whom Allāh guides is the [rightly] guided,**" for there is no way to attain true guidance except from Him. "**But he whom He sends astray – never will you find for him a protecting guide**" because there is none who can overturn His decree if Allāh should withhold His guidance. Thus, from among all of their people, these few believers were the ones who were guided by their Lord.

It should not be forgotten that Allāh has given human beings a measure of free will to make decisions and act upon them, which entails for them responsibility and accountability. So when the Qur'ān says, "**He guides whom He wills and sends astray whom He wills,**"³¹ it means that Allāh has willed to guide those (such as the believing youths) who seek and accept His guidance. This is evident in His promise:

وَالَّذِينَ جَهَدُوا فِيمَا لَهُدِينَّهُمْ سُبْلَنَا

"Those who strive in Our way, We shall guide them to Our paths."³²

Similarly, Allāh leaves those who refuse His guidance to their own choice and deals with them accordingly in absolute justice. For example, He said concerning the Children of Israel who had abused Prophet Mūsā:

فَلَمَّا زَاغُوا أَزَغَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ

"And when they deviated, Allāh caused their hearts to deviate."³³

The Creator has thus willed to allow His servants to utilize the freedom He gave them and act according to their own preference, either to follow His guidance or neglect it; and this is their test in life. The principle of cause and effect is evident once again in both instances: in short-term and long-term results.

... Āyah 18 ...

وَخَسِبُوكُمْ أَيْقَاظًا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ وَنَقِيلُوكُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الْشِمالِ وَكَلْبُوكُمْ بَسِطٌ ذِرَاعِيهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ
أَطْلَعْتَ عَلَيْكُمْ لَوَلَيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا وَلَمُلِئَتْ مِنْهُمْ رُعْبًا

And you would think them awake, while they were asleep. And We turned them to the right and to the left, while their dog stretched his forelegs at the entrance. If you had looked at them, you would have turned from them in flight and been filled by them with terror.

³¹ See 14:4, 16:93 and 74:31. Allāh leaves or sends astray only those who choose to reject His guidance.

³² Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:69.

³³ Sūrah aṣ-Ṣaff, 61:5.

Although they were sound asleep, they appeared to be awake as their bodies turned from left to right and from right to left – an eerie scene.³⁴ Ibn ‘Abbās remarked, "If they had not turned periodically, the earth would have consumed them."

Their guard dog lay at the mouth of the cave with its forelegs outstretched. Ibn Katheer commented, "The dog was included in their blessing, so he slept as they slept in that condition. This is the benefit of keeping company with righteous people, so this dog was mentioned along with them and was given status as well." Al-Qurtubī said, "The dog followed them and became attached to them; therefore Allāh mentioned him along with them. This holds good tidings for those whose deeds are less than their companions, for by being in the company of the righteous, they obtain the same blessings; and the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that a person will be in the Hereafter with those he loves."³⁵

The verse mentions that their appearance was terrifying. If any intruder had come across the inhabitants of the cave in that state, eyes open yet uncommunicative, seemingly awake yet strangely abnormal in form and movement, he could not possibly have approached them. Rather, he would have raced to escape from that place out of shock and fright. In His vast wisdom and mercy, their Lord had cast this disturbing appearance upon the youths to prevent any hand from touching them before the term He decreed came to an end.

... Āyahs 19-20 ...

وَكَذَلِكَ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِيَتَسَاءَلُوا بَيْنَهُمْ قَالَ قَاتِلُهُمْ كَمْ لَبِثْتُمْ قَالُوا لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ
قَالُوا رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثْتُمْ فَابْعَثُوا أَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرْقَكُمْ هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ فَلَيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهُمْ أَرَكَى طَعَامًا
فَلَيَأْتِكُمْ بِرِزْقٍ مِّنْهُ وَلَيَتَلَطَّفُ وَلَا يُشْعِرُنَّ بِكُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿١٩﴾ إِنَّهُمْ إِنْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ يَرْجُمُوكُمْ أَوْ
يُعِدُّونَكُمْ فِي مِلَّتِهِمْ وَلَنْ تُفْلِحُوا إِذَا أَبْدَأُوا

And similarly,³⁶ We awakened them that they might question one another. Said a speaker from among them, "How long have you remained [here]?" They said, "We have remained a day or part of a day." They said, "Your Lord is most knowing of how long you remained. So send one of you with this silver coinage of yours to the city and let him look to which is the purest food and bring you provision from it; and let him be cautious. And let no one be aware of you. Indeed, if they come to know of you, they will stone you or return you to their religion. And never would you succeed, then – ever."

³⁴The turning of their bodies is thought by some to have been caused by a principle known as phototropism, or natural attraction to sunlight, but Allāh knows best.

³⁵In a ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

³⁶By the will of Allāh, just as He had put them to sleep.

In the course of time, Allāh awakened them from their slumber, and they were just as they had been before, having lost nothing of their youth, health or physical features. They began to question each other about what had happened to them. The verse relates their discussion as to how long they had remained in the cave. Some of the youths reckoned the time they spent asleep therein to have been only "**a day or part of a day**" because they had entered it at the beginning of day and awakened at the end of a day. Others expressed doubt about it, saying their Lord knew best about the matter.³⁷

But now there was the more pressing matter of finding food. They decided to send one of their number with some silver coins to the town to search for the best food available. They advised him to exercise utmost vigilance and caution in order to avoid bringing attention to themselves, for they assumed that their enemies were still eager to capture them. And if that happened, the people would surely resort to a policy of abuse and intimidation to force them back to the polytheistic way of life. In that case they could not be successful in this world or in the next.

"They will stone you" describes a form of state terrorism practiced against nonconformists – either compliance or torment with no third alternative. A threat of this kind was issued to the three messengers mentioned in *Sūrah Yā Seen*, who were warned:

لَبِنَ لَمْ تَتَهُوْا لَنْجُونَكُرْ وَلَيَمَسَنَكُمْ مِنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

"If you do not desist, we will stone you and you will be afflicted by a painful punishment from us."³⁸

It can be understood literally as a prolonged and painful process of being stoned to death, but is symbolic of every form of agonizing torture, the only escape from which is to comply with the demands of one's oppressors.

Thus, the young men awoke to find themselves hungry and fearful, unaware that years had passed and times had changed, that the city they knew had been altered by succeeding generations and that the rule of tyranny had been replaced by one of faith and justice.

... Āyah 21 ...

وَكَذَلِكَ أَعْثَرَنَا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا إِذْ يَنْتَزَعُونَ بَيْنَهُمْ
أَمْرِهِمْ فَقَالُوا أَبْنُوا عَلَيْهِمْ بُنْيَانًا رَبُّهُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِهِمْ قَالَ الَّذِينَ عَلَيَّ أَمْرِهِمْ لَنَتَخَذُنَ عَلَيْهِمْ
مَسْجِدًا

³⁷This indicates that when something is uncertain, one should say, "Allāhu a'lam" (literally, "Allāh is most knowing"), for He alone knows that which is unknown to man.

³⁸*Sūrah Yā Seen*, 36:18.

And similarly, We caused them to be found that they [who found them] would know that the promise of Allāh is truth and that of the Hour there is no doubt. [That was] when they³⁹ disputed among themselves about their affair and [then] said, "Construct over them a structure; their Lord is most knowing about them." Said those who prevailed in the matter, "We will surely take [for ourselves] upon them a masjid."⁴⁰

Several early commentators mentioned that while the general population of the city had now accepted belief in Allāh, there were some who doubted the matter of resurrection.⁴¹ Therefore, Allāh revived *ashāb al-kahf* and allowed them to be discovered as a sign of evidence. Drawing attention to their amazing condition convinced people of the divine ability to restore life and of the truth of Allāh's promise to do so in the Hereafter.

Commentators relate that the youth who was sent to buy them something to eat disguised himself and walked at a distance from the main road until he reached the city. Many generations had come and gone, so he did not recognize anything familiar to him and did not know any of the people. Confused, he said to himself, "The town I left yesterday was not like this, so I had best hasten to leave." He went to a man who was selling food and gave him all the coins he had in exchange for whatever they would buy. When the man saw the coins, he did not recognize their inscription. He showed them to his neighbor, and they were passed around while people were saying, "Perhaps he has discovered a treasure." They began asking him about himself – from where he obtained this money and where he came from. He replied, "I am from this town; I was here last evening." Assuming him mad, they took him to their ruler, who questioned him until he told them of how he and his companions had taken refuge in a cave. At length they perceived it had occurred many ages ago and were greatly amazed.

The king and his people accompanied the young man to the cave. Nearing it he told them, "Let me enter first to inform my companions." One version of the story states that he entered the cave and disappeared. Another maintains that the people entered after him and met the other youths. The king greeted and embraced them, for he was a believer. They rejoiced at that and spoke pleasant words to him. Then they bade him farewell and returned to their beds, where Allāh took their souls. However, we have no accurate knowledge of this, and Allāh knows best.

The Qur'ān itself relates no more than the incident following their death. The astonished citizens were gathered outside the cave, discussing the miraculous occurrence and how those extraordinary young men should be

³⁹The people of the city.

⁴⁰i.e., we will make this site a place of worship. The term "*masjid*" is not restricted to a mosque. It literally means a place of *sujūd* (prostration) or worship in general.

⁴¹The time of the Resurrection (*al-Qiyāmah*) is often called "the Hour."

honored and remembered. Some suggested building a structure to seal the mouth of the cave, making it a grave for them and leaving them as they were. But the dominant faction insisted that a memorial be constructed over them and taken as a place of worship.⁴²

There are those who make use of this statement to support a false claim that it is permissible to build a *masjid* over a grave. However, the fact that Allāh quoted the influential people of that time as saying they would take the site as a place of worship does not in any way imply that He approved of it. Rather, it merely makes clear that the more powerful group imposed their will upon the others.⁴³ Indeed, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) deplored this practice, saying, "May Allāh curse the Jews and Christians, for they have taken the graves of their prophets as places of worship."⁴⁴ And he said, "Those before you used to take the graves of their prophets and righteous men as places of worship. Do not take graves as places of worship; I forbid you from that."⁴⁵

... Āyah 22 ...

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَّابِعُهُمْ كُلُّهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كُلُّهُمْ رَجَمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ
 وَثَامِنُهُمْ كُلُّهُمْ قُلْ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعِدَّتِهِمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَاهِرًا وَلَا تَسْتَفِتِ
 فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا

They [i.e., people] will say there were three, the fourth of them being their dog; and they will say there were five, the sixth of them being their dog – guessing at the unseen; and they will say there were seven, and the eighth of them was their dog. Say, [O Muḥammad], "My Lord is most knowing of their number. None knows them except a few. So do not argue about them except with an obvious argument⁴⁶ and do not inquire about them among [the speculators] from anyone."

Allāh (ﷻ) discloses here that in later times attempts would be made by people to divert attention from the essence of that event to such nonessential matters as the number of youths in the cave. In reality, there is no advantage in

⁴²This is further evidence that the oppressive establishment which persecuted believers had been replaced by one that worshipped Allāh.

⁴³Even if one assumes that this practice could have been allowed before the prophethood of Muḥammad (ﷺ), it is clearly not permissible after it since he emphatically forbade and condemned it.

⁴⁴Al-Bukhārī and Muslim. ‘Ā’ishah commented, "He was warning against doing what they had done. Had it not been for that, the grave of the Prophet (ﷺ) would have been made to stand out, but he feared it being taken as a place of worship."

⁴⁵Muslim.

⁴⁶i.e., one from the Qur’ān. An alternative meaning can be "a superficial argument," i.e., a brief and simple one, in order not to waste time.

knowing how many they were, and that is why the Prophet (ﷺ) was instructed not to get involved in such discussions or seek information from those who merely speculate without adequate knowledge. Ibn Katheer added that he (ﷺ) was told not to give more than a brief reply since there is no great benefit in its knowledge.

Their number is thought to be seven from the fact that the first two possibilities were made unlikely by the words "**guessing at the unseen.**"⁴⁷ At the third, the Qur'an remains silent, leading scholars to assume it is correct, but Allāh knows best. The Messenger (ﷺ) himself was told to say no more than, "**My Lord is most knowing of their number,**" which is undoubtedly the most accurate answer. Only Allāh knows the truth of the matter; therefore, a Muslim should not allow himself to be distracted by irrelevant debates and unimportant issues. Allāh has ordered:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

"And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge."⁴⁸

Instead, one should focus his attention and mental energy on what is beneficial: understanding the substance of events and the lessons learned from them, as well as the proper response based upon divine guidance.

Among the points to be considered regarding the account of *ashāb al-kahf* are the following:

- ♦ Ignorant people are easily led by others to commit *shirk*
- ♦ Allāh guides whom He wills, and they are those who wish to be guided
- ♦ Allāh supports those who adhere to truth and rely upon Him
- ♦ Allāh is not bound by the physical laws of the universe which He created

... Āyahs 23-24 ...

وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَانِي إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكَ غَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾ إِلَّا أَن يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ وَأَذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيْتَ وَقُلْ عَسَى أَن
يَهْدِيَنِي رَبِّي لَا فَرَبَّ مِنْ هَذَا رَشِيدًا ﴿٢٤﴾

And never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow," except [when adding], "If Allāh wills." And remember your Lord⁴⁹ when you forget [it] and say, "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct."

When the Quraysh presented Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) with the three questions from the Jewish rabbis of Madīnah, they demanded that he answer them in order

⁴⁷The literal meaning of *rajman bil-ghayb* is throwing stones at an unseen target. It is not expected that it would be hit, and if it was, it would be purely by coincidence.

⁴⁸*Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:36.

⁴⁹Or "**mention your Lord**" by saying, "*in shā' Allāh.*"

to confirm his claim of prophethood. He responded that he would provide the answers the next day, but neglected to say, "In shā' Allāh" ("If Allāh wills"). Consequently, he was kept waiting for the reply an uncomfortably long period of two weeks, after which the revelation was finally brought by the angel Jibreel.

The verses contain a reminder to the Prophet (ﷺ), and through him to all people, that nothing can occur unless their Lord should will it. For every movement, indeed, every breath taken by a living being is dependent upon the will of Allāh, and the human eye cannot see a single instant into the future, so everything beyond the present remains an uncertainty.⁵⁰ Therefore, it is only correct and appropriate before the Creator of mankind to attribute any future act or occurrence to His will by saying, "In shā' Allāh."

Finally, allowing for occasions of human forgetfulness, Allāh (ﷻ) directed His Prophet and every Muslim, if he should forget the addition of "in shā' Allāh," to bring his Lord to mind and ask Him for guidance. The word "idhkur" may be interpreted as either "remember" or "mention." Scholars explained the latter as meaning that one should say "in shā' Allāh" upon remembering. Ibn Katheer adds that because forgetfulness is caused by Shaytān, the mention of Allāh is a remedy which drives him away. Indeed, there is healing for the heart in the remembrance and mention of Allāh.

The instruction to say, "**Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct**" may be in reference to the aforementioned error of failing to mention the will of Allāh, or it can be general in meaning. Thus, some scholars gave the explanation that when asked about any matter about which one is uncertain, he should ask Allāh, supplicating Him and requesting His guidance to that which is most correct and prudent.

... Āyahs 25-26 ...

وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ وَأَزَادُوا تِسْعًا ﴿٢٥﴾ قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثُوا لَهُ غَيْرُ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَبْصَرَهُمْ وَأَسْمَعَهُمْ مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا يُشَرِّكُ فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدٌ



And they remained in their cave for three hundred years and exceeded by nine.⁵¹ Say, "Allāh is most knowing of how long they remained. He has [knowledge of] the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth. How seeing is He and how hearing! They have not besides Him any protector, and He shares not His legislation with anyone."

⁵⁰This does not mean that one should not plan ahead; but when doing so, the divine will should be taken into account with knowledge that the outcome of every intent is predestined. A similar instruction imparted in the Qur'ān through the Prophet (ﷺ) was: "**Say, 'Nothing will happen to us except what Allāh has decreed for us.'**" (9:51)

⁵¹i.e., 309 lunar years.

The story of *ashāb al-kahf* comes to a close with reminders of the precise and all-encompassing knowledge of Allāh, His awareness of every matter, His complete sovereignty His and unshared authority over all creation. One of these reminders is in His specification of the exact period of time the youths spent in the cave in conjunction with the statement that He alone has accurate knowledge of the hidden realities of the heavens and earth.

Up to this point there has been no indication of the length of time the believers remained asleep in the cave. This verse puts an end to pointless speculation by stating the term to be three hundred and nine years.⁵² Allāh alone has correct knowledge of that period; hence, His revelation of this number cannot be disputed.

The words "**abṣir bihi wa asmi**" have two grammatically correct meanings.⁵³ The more commonly cited one is an exclamation of praise: "How seeing He is and how hearing," indicating that Allāh sees and hears everything perfectly and precisely. The second is a command to the Prophet (ﷺ): "Make it seen [i.e., understood by the people] and heard [by them]."

The conclusion of the verse states that He has no partners or associates. Allāh is the only manager of time, space and all its dimensions, and the known and unknown aspects of all things. Thus, people have no true guardian apart from Allāh, and He designates to no one a share in His legislation, sovereignty or supreme authority.

... Āyah 27 ...

 وَاتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابٍ رَبِّكَ لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحِدًا

And recite,⁵⁴ [O Muḥammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no changer of His words, and never will you find in other than Him a refuge.

The Prophet (ﷺ) is now ordered to recite, adhere to and teach what has been revealed to him of his Lord's scripture, the Qur'ān. Several commentators have considered this verse to be a conclusion to the account of *ashāb al-kahf*, meaning that in spite of all else that might be related concerning those events, the Book of Allāh is the final statement on the matter, and it is not subject to

⁵²Some scholars, such as Ibn Katheer, were of the opinion that the 300 years is mentioned according to the solar calendar and the addition of nine is to correspond with the lunar calendar. Others have disagreed, pointing out that the Arabs, in whose language the Qur'ān was revealed, had no association with the solar calendar and mention of it would have been irrelevant. Their view is that the period stated was merely 300 + 9 lunar years.

⁵³Among the linguistic miracles of the Qur'ān is that on occasion, two or more meanings may be expressed simultaneously using the same words.

⁵⁴An additional meaning is "follow," i.e., abide by.

alteration. Others held that the verse was revealed in response to the demands of the Quraysh that the Prophet (ﷺ) change some verses of the Qur'ān which they considered objectionable. The reply to this was that no one may change what Allāh has revealed. Ibn Jareer at-Tabarī tied the two parts of the verse together, as one might say, "Unless you convey the message of your Lord, you will find no refuge from Him." Allāh knows best, and He is the only refuge for mankind.

... Āyah 28 ...

وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَدَوِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ
تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الْدُّنْيَا وَلَا تُطِعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلَنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَنَهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا

And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His countenance. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect.⁵⁵

The Prophet (ﷺ) is instructed to keep company with those servants of Allāh who show constant patience, humility and righteousness in character, who have upright conduct and remain faithful to Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ). The verse is said to have been revealed after influential leaders of the Quraysh proposed that the Prophet (ﷺ) convene an assembly for them alone and not allow the poor people who had accepted Islam to sit with them. Because he was eager that they accept Islam, it occurred to him that it might be advantageous to make this concession. Thereupon, Allāh sent down His prohibition preceded by a command to remain contented with the company of sincere believers. On a similar occasion Allāh revealed:

وَلَا تَطْرُدِ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَدَوِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ

"And do not send away those who call upon their Lord morning and afternoon, seeking His countenance."⁵⁶

Such verses reflect values and principles which are obligatory upon every Muslim and contain sound instruction for all. There can be no divisions in Islam based on wealth, class, lineage, race or nationality. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) warned that anyone who had in his heart an atom's weight of pride would not enter Paradise. Then he added, "*Pride is the prevention of right and looking down upon people.*"⁵⁷

⁵⁵Or "in excess," exceeding the limits of Allāh. Both meanings are valid.

⁵⁶Sūrah al-An 'ām, 6:52.

⁵⁷Muslim and at-Tirmidhī.

Believers benefit from this directive as well, and from associating with one another and interacting, for they remind, advise and learn from their brothers in faith.⁵⁸ Allāh has stated:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاونَ عَنِ
الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَوةَ وَيُطْبِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ

"The believing men and women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer and give zakāh and obey Allāh and His Messenger."⁵⁹

The atmosphere of compassion which binds a Muslim to his brothers everywhere requires that they share their hopes and afflictions and protect one another from every kind of evil, including that caused by themselves. The Messenger (ﷺ) explained: "A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He neither wrongs him nor gives him up. Whoever is concerned with the need of his brother – Allāh is concerned with his need. And whoever relieves a Muslim from distress – Allāh will relieve him of a distress on the Day of Resurrection. And whoever covers the fault of a Muslim – Allāh will cover his fault on the Day of Resurrection."⁶⁰

And as the Prophet (ﷺ) was ordered, believers, too, ought not to seek the company of those who exhibit sinfulness, greed, arrogance or spitefulness, and those who support opposition to Islam in order to pursue vain worldly objectives. To forget the eternal life of the Hereafter is a grave error. The Qur'ān reminds:

وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُوَ خَيْرُ لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

"The life of this world is not but amusement and diversion. But the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear [Allāh]. So will you not reason?"⁶¹

The description of someone whose heart is heedless and who follows his desire has been attributed in some *tafseers* to specific individuals or to the disbelievers of Quraysh. However, the prohibition of obedience to such people is a general one, inclusive of all who make demands contrary to Islamic *Shari'ah*.⁶² They are of two categories in relation to their deeds, both of which are depicted by the word *furuṭ*: those who are negligent and fall short in their duties and those who commit excess in sin, transgressing the limits set by Allāh.

⁵⁸In modern times they find comfort and strength in company with one another when Islām is being criticized by adversaries throughout the world.

⁵⁹Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:71.

⁶⁰Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁶¹Sūrah al-An‘ām, 6:32. Another meaning is: "those who avoid [wrongdoing]."

⁶²Sufficient as evidence is the well-known *hadīth*, "There is no obedience to a created being in disobedience of the Creator." Ahmād and at-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥīḥ.

... Āyahs 29-31 ...

وَقُلِ الْحُقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءْ فَلِيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءْ فَلِيَكُفُرْ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ
 سُرَادِقُهَا وَإِنْ يَسْتَغِيثُوا يُغَاوِرُونَ مَأْمَلَهُمْ يَشْوِى الْوُجُوهُ بِئْسَ الشَّرَابُ وَسَاءَتْ مُرَفَّقًا ﴿٣١﴾ إِنَّ
 الَّذِينَ ءامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ عَمَلاً ﴿٣٢﴾ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدَنِ
 تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْآَنْهَرُ تَحْلُوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَيَلْبِسُونَ ثِيابًا حُضْرًا مِنْ سُنْدُسٍ وَإِسْتَبَرَقٍ
 مُتَّكِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى آلَّرَأِيكُ بِنَعْمَ الْثَّوَابُ وَحَسُنَتْ مُرَفَّقًا ﴿٣٣﴾

And say, "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills – let him believe; and whoever wills – let him disbelieve." Indeed, We have prepared for the wrongdoers a fire whose walls will surround them. And if they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like murky oil, which scalds [their] faces. Wretched is the drink, and evil is the resting place. Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds – indeed, We will not allow to be lost the reward of any who did well in deeds. Those will have gardens of perpetual residence; beneath them rivers will flow. They will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade, reclining therein on adorned couches. Excellent is the reward, and good is the resting place.

The Qur'ān upholds freedom of choice in the matter of pursuing truth or falsehood.⁶³ The rational mind is the basis for religious responsibility and accountability, and acceptance of right guidance through free will is what makes human beings worthy of their Creator's approval and reward. The Qur'ān states:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيْرِ

"There is no compulsion in [accepting] religion. The truth has been made distinct from falsehood."⁶⁴

The duty of the prophets ceased with delivery of Allāh's message to their peoples. Now that prophethood has ended, that obligation rests upon the entire Muslim *ummah*. Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) said, "*Convey from me, even if only one āyah.*"⁶⁵ After that, it is the responsibility of those the message has reached to accept the truth, adhere to it and pass it on to others.

Nonetheless, when people choose to reject truth, they should be prepared to face the consequences of their choice. When campaigns against Islam, its

⁶³It has never been permitted to compel people to enter Islām by the use of weapons or any other means. Muslims are expected to invite non-Muslims to the truth of Islām with words of wisdom, sound arguments and a pleasant manner.

⁶⁴*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:256.

⁶⁵Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī.

scholars and sincere believers persist, the enemies have been informed of the punishment that awaits them. On the other hand, those whose conduct is righteous despite the evil surrounding them are assured of their Lord's reward in full. The vivid Qur'ānic descriptions of both the Hellfire and Paradise serve to produce fear of wrongdoing in conjunction with desire to earn the eternal pleasures of the next life. The option is open for every person to take the path he wishes, and the destination at the end of each has been made clear by none but the Lord Himself.

... Āyahs 32-34 ...

وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا رَّجُلَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ مِنْ أَعْنَبٍ وَحَفَنَهَا بِنَخْلٍ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زَرْعًا ﴿٣٢﴾ كِلْتَاهُمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ إِاتَّ أَكْلَاهَا وَلَمْ تَظْلِمْ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا وَفَجَرَنَا خِلَانَهُمَا نَهَرًا ﴿٣٣﴾ وَكَارَ لَهُ ثَمَرًا فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِيهِ وَهُوَ تُحَاوِرُهُ أَنَا أَكْثُرُ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَأَعْزُ نَفَرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

And present to them an example of two men: We granted to one of them two gardens of grapevines, and We bordered them with palm trees and placed between them [fields of] crops. Each of the two gardens produced its fruit and did not fall short thereof in anything. And We caused to gush forth within them a river. And he had fruit, so he said to his companion while he was conversing with him, "I am greater than you in wealth and mightier in [numbers of] men."

Allāh now commands the Prophet (ﷺ) to relate a story that forcefully warns against excessive concern with worldly life. For it can corrupt the heart to such an extent that *dunyā* replaces Allāh as its main focus. This was true of the wealthy owner of two gardens who was confident that he was superior to his less affluent companion. The corrupt elite often brainwash themselves into believing they have more rights than others and that they should have control of power in their societies.⁶⁶

When the Prophet (ﷺ) warned that no one who had in his heart an atom's weight of pride would enter Paradise, he qualified it by saying, "*Pride is the prevention of right and looking down upon people.*"⁶⁷ And he said, "*It is sufficient evil for a person to look down on his brother Muslim.*"⁶⁸ He meant that the evil of this sin is sufficient to earn for someone a reputation for bad character and punishment in the Hellfire. The story of the two gardens demonstrates how a facade of superficial religion mixed with inflated pride will be dealt with sooner or later by Allāh, the Exalted.

⁶⁶In modern times they lead important groups and take control of the media, business, politics, education, and even the administration and management of religious institutions.

⁶⁷Narrated by Muslim and at-Tirmidhī.

⁶⁸Narrated by Muslim.

The "fruit" possessed by the prosperous man has been interpreted to mean the crop or produce of his gardens but may also apply to wealth in general, i.e., the fruit of his labor or investment. In the course of discussion with his companion, he begins to boast with self-importance that he is superior in terms of possessions, properties, servants and children.⁶⁹

One afflicted with such a disease bears an irresponsible attitude toward others; he sees them as undeserving of his attention, of simple kindness, or even some of their basic rights. Among those he disdains, he cannot bring himself to visit one who is ill, comfort one who is troubled, or congratulate one who has been blessed with a favor – except out of hypocrisy. He will not concern himself with their needs, oppose injustice to them, or give them their rights; in fact, he does not even perceive that they have rights.⁷⁰

... Āyah 35 ...

وَدَخَلَ جَنَّتَهُ وَهُوَ ظَالِمٌ لِنَفْسِهِ قَالَ مَا أَظُنُّ أَنْ تَبْيَدَ هَذِهِ أَبَدًا

And he entered his garden while he was unjust to himself.⁷¹ He said, "I do not think that this will perish – ever."

Absorbed in self-deception, the prosperous man entered his garden with an attitude of arrogance, disbelief and denial of divine justice. Allāh (ﷻ) described it as injustice to himself, for the wrongdoer subjects none but his own soul to the anger of his Lord and punishment in the life to come.

Worldly success and material wealth tend to delude those of little faith and make them overconfident and egotistical. They forget the power of Allāh, take no notice of His signs, and disregard all warnings. Many are ungrateful because they consider the assets bestowed on them to be the fruit of their own efforts or merit, making them a source of pride and prestige among their contemporaries. But it is Allāh who is the true owner of all that exists, and while He tests certain people with hardships, He tests others by giving them extensive wealth and resources.

The rich man, corrupted by his wealth, had lost touch with reality and was living in a world of fantasy. His faith in Allāh had essentially become a traditional belief of no substance. He had lost all consciousness of his Lord as the Supreme Being who gives life and wealth and can take them away whenever He wills. Intoxicated by his own importance, he utters a statement of unbelief...

⁶⁹Qatādah commented, "This is the aspiration of the wicked – to have much wealth and a great entourage." (*Tafseer Ibn Katheer*)

⁷⁰People often pass judgments on others according to what is apparent to them, and criticism can turn into scorn or ridicule. Many fall into the error of imitating their associates in this respect and thus expose themselves to their Lord's anger. Unfortunately, this is the case with many who take pride in their knowledge, their work or their position of leadership.

⁷¹i.e., proud and ungrateful to Allāh.

... Āyah 36 ...

وَمَا أَظْنُ السَّاعَةَ قَابِمَةً وَلَئِنْ رُدِدتُ إِلَى رَبِّي لَأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهَا مُنْقَلَبًا

"And I do not think the Hour will occur. And even if I should be brought back to my Lord, I will surely find better than this as a return."

His lack of understanding and weakness of faith in Allāh had left him with a distorted picture of himself and the world around him. Obsession with this life and its many attractions led him to declare, "**And I do not think the Hour will occur,**" expressing disbelief in the Hereafter. Then, as if conceding to a remote possibility, he added that if there should in fact be a return to Allāh, he would expect to find there something even better than his worldly assets and advantages.

Although he still recognized Allāh as his Lord theoretically, he had effectively turned away from Him in reality. The external shell of religion without its vital internal core of morality could not protect him from materialistic corruption. Thus, his wealth led him to revere himself and his property rather than Allāh, and he lost all consciousness of the Last Day and the Judgement to come. He allowed himself to be deceived by his vast estate of gardens with rivers flowing through them and by the orchards and fruits he possessed, imagining that all this would never come to an end. Subsequently, a further corruption afflicted his soul – the belief that he was so exclusive that he would always be favored by his Lord. This he took for granted without evidence; the line of reasoning was merely that he would not have obtained so many worldly blessings unless he had been favored by Allāh.

The Qur'ān describes a similar attitude among the disbelievers of Quraysh:

أَفَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ بِغَايَاتِنَا وَقَالَ لَا أُوتَيْنَ مَالًا وَوَلَدًا

"Have you seen he who disbelieved in Our verses and said, 'I will surely be given wealth and children?'"⁷²

These descriptions serve as a warning to all those who believe they will enter Paradise without having obeyed the commands of Allāh, considering themselves for some reason exempted from accountability.⁷³

⁷²i.e., in the next life. The Qur'ānic quotation is *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:77.

⁷³This type of self-deception is evident in people who say they believe in Allāh although they have no fear of Him, always citing His mercy while disregarding His justice, refusing to worship Him as He ordained while claiming to love Him and declaring that their hearts are pure.

… Āyahs 37-38 …

قَالَ لَهُ صَاحِبُهُ وَهُوَ تُحَاوِرُهُ أَكَفَرْتَ بِاللَّذِي خَلَقَكَ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّنَاكَ رَجُلًا
لَّكِنَّا هُوَ اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا

His companion said to him while he was conversing with him, "Have you disbelieved in Him who created you from dust and then from a sperm-drop and then proportioned you [as] a man? But as for me, He is Allāh, my Lord, and I do not associate with my Lord anyone."

His companion answered the man's arrogant claims by focusing attention on the humble origin of all human beings and then on the remarkable process of developmental creation as proof of the divine power and ability. He reminded him that his attitude was one indicative of disbelief. For while many people consider themselves righteous, they behave in ways contrary to divinely revealed moral values.

Indeed, the test of those whom Allāh has favored in this world is bound with responsibility. Only a believer will feel humble before Allāh and acknowledge that whatever he has of possessions, intelligence, abilities and opportunities are provided on lease to him from his Lord, to be used in ways pleasing to Him. He perceives that the gratitude due to Allāh is best shown by sharing his blessings with those less fortunate.

The assertion by the wealthy man that he was favored over his companion implied that the latter was somehow inferior, and that it was for this reason he had been left by his Creator without wealth and property. But then again, no one should be so unjust as to blame his Lord for the economic injustices people might suffer. On the contrary, Allāh has ordered that the affluent must share a minimal portion of their wealth with the needy to preserve a balance in society and stated that they will be called to account and punished in the Hereafter for failure to do so.

The poorer of the two men, who was the more noble of them in the sight of Allāh, declared that he could not consider anyone an equal to his most exalted Lord. He openly acknowledged that his existence and the existence of all things was due to none but the all-powerful Creator, who alone is worthy of devotion.

Throughout the *sūrah*, Allāh brings attention to the fact that the majority of people ascribe partners to Him, while cautioning against this greatest of the major sins. Association (*shirk*) means to consider anyone, anything or any concept equal to Allāh, or to have a purpose in life other than the acceptance of Allāh and act accordingly. The Qur'ān has warned that while Allāh may forgive all other sins, He will not forgive *shirk*.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Refer to 4:48 and 4:116.

... Āyahs 39-41 ...

وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ إِنْ تَرَنَ أَنَّا أَقْلَمْ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَوَلَدًا ﴿٤١﴾ فَعَسَىٰ
 رَبِّنَا أَنْ يُؤْتِنَ خَيْرًا مِّنْ جَنَّتِكَ وَيُرِسِّلَ عَلَيْهَا حُسْبَانًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتُصْبِحَ صَعِيدًا زَلَقًا ﴿٤٢﴾ أَوْ يُصْبِحَ
 مَأْوَاهَا غَوْرًا فَلَنْ تَسْتَطِعَ لَهُ طَلَبًا ﴿٤٣﴾

And why did you, when you entered your garden, not say, "What Allāh willed [has occurred]; there is no power except in Allāh"? Although you see me less than you in wealth and children, it may be that my Lord will give me [something] better than your garden and will send upon it a [disastrous] penalty from the sky, and it will become a slippery ground, or its water will become sunken [into the earth], so you would never be able to seek it.

The poorer man was also wise enough to discard the false argument that poverty is something disgraceful. Instead, he gave a valuable instruction to the rich: that whenever they are pleased with an accomplishment or material possession, they should say, "*Mā shā Allāh, lā quwwata illā billāh.*" ("What Allāh willed has occurred; there is no power except with Allāh.") This is a significant way of acknowledging that Allāh is the Supreme Being and that nothing can happen unless He wills it. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) taught something similar; he said, "*Shall I not direct you to one of the doors of Paradise? It is 'Lā hawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh.'*" ("There is no might and no power except with Allāh.")⁷⁵

The believer reminded the arrogant man that Allāh gives wealth and power to whomever He wills in order to test the conduct of the rich as well as the poor, and that He is also able to remove wealth and power at any time and to change any situation. Wealth is at times a temporary benefit granted by Allāh, the Exalted; He can make a poor person rich or annihilate the wealth of a rich person instantly according to His plan. Therefore, one should never take blessings for granted.

All things exist and continue to exist owing to Allāh's will. The arrogant man was told to consider how his Lord and Provider could rightfully and easily deal with his conceit and ingratitude by removing the source of his pride through an occurrence of nature.

The "penalty" (*husbān*) has been explained as a calamity sent down as punishment for evildoing. It might be an intense, burning wind that leaves nothing but soft slippery dust. Or it might be a forceful, destructive rain that would ravage the garden and uproot its plants and trees, leaving only slippery mud.

⁷⁵Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥīḥ.

The believer also cautioned that those flourishing gardens could easily be reduced to a land without vegetation, arid and unproductive, if the springs and rivers which irrigated them ceased to flow on the earth's surface. The disappearance of water into the earth would surely mean the end of every kind of life. And if that should be the will of Allāh, who could ever restore what He had taken away?⁷⁶

Suddenly, the Qur'ān replaces the scene of affluence and prosperity with one of devastation and destruction...

... Āyah 42 ...

وَأُحِيطَ بِشَمْرِهِ فَأَصْبَحَ يُقْلِبُ كَفَيْهِ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْفَقَ فِيهَا وَهِيَ حَاوِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ عُرُوشَهَا وَيَقُولُ يَنْلَيْتَنِي لَمْ

أُشْرِكْ بِرَبِّيْ أَحَدًا

And his fruits were encompassed [by ruin], so he began to turn his hands about [in dismay] over what he had spent on it, while it had collapsed upon its trellises, and said, "Oh, I wish I had not associated with my Lord anyone."⁷⁷

Transgression, oppression and heedlessness are causes of both individual and collective calamities, as Allāh has stated in the Qur'ān:

وَمَا أَصَبَّكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبْتُ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

"And whatever strikes you of disaster, it is for what your hands have earned; and He pardons much."⁷⁸

It came to pass that the rich man's properties were utterly destroyed as punishment for his disbelief and ingratitude to Allāh. Struck by affliction, the owner of the gardens saw the truth of what he had been told and realized his mistake. Only then did he acknowledge his sin and regret it; but it was too late.

This story teaches a valuable lesson – those who consider themselves permanent holders of power and authority in the land can instantly be made to realize their vulnerability by the will of Allāh. At such moments they perceive that they can neither help themselves nor anyone else.

The warning is directed to mankind in general and Muslims in particular: to beware of committing a similar error, allowing material possessions and worldly matters to replace Allāh in their hearts. The Qur'ān states that such people are penalized for committing this kind of *shirk* by being deprived of Allāh's guidance:

⁷⁶As stated in 67:30.

⁷⁷He attributed his prosperity to himself rather than to Allāh and disbelieved in the account of the Hereafter.

⁷⁸*Sūrah ash-Shūrā*, 42:30.

أَفَرَءَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ، هَوَنَهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ، وَجَعَلَ عَلَىٰ
بَصَرِهِ غِشْوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

"Have you seen he who has taken as his god his [own] desire, and Allāh has sent him astray due to knowledge⁷⁹ and has set a seal upon his hearing and his heart and put over his vision a veil? So who can guide him after Allāh? Then will you not be reminded?"⁸⁰

And it warns of the consequence:

لَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا ءَاخَرَ فَتَقْعُدَ مَذْمُومًا مَحْذُولًا

"Do not make [as equal] with Allāh another deity and [thereby] become reproached and forsaken."⁸¹

Did the once proud transgressor regret his acts of *shirk* and wrongdoing or merely the loss of his property? The expressed wish that he had not associated anyone (i.e., himself) with his Lord suggests that perhaps he repented as a result of this difficult lesson. However, truth of the matter is known only to Allāh, and it is He who will judge with absolute justice.

... Āyahs 43-44 ...

وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ، فِئَةٌ يَنْصُرُونَهُ، مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مُنْتَصِرًا ﴿٤٣﴾ هُنَالِكَ الْوَلَيَةُ لِلَّهِ الْحَقُّ هُوَ خَيْرُ ثَوَابًا
وَخَيْرُ عُقَبَا

And there was for him no company to aid him other than Allāh, nor could he defend himself. There, the authority is [completely] for Allāh, the True Reality. He is best in reward and best in outcome.

Those who put their trust in something other than Allāh feel confused, deserted and hopeless in the face of misfortune. At such times they lose confidence in themselves and find no support from those they once revered in place of Allāh. This is true of the worldly life and even more so of the Hereafter. The word *hunālika* can refer to both, meaning "at such a time" (as when people are rendered helpless by an overwhelming event) or "there" i.e., at the time and place of Judgement. In either case, when Allāh has decided to punish someone, none can assist him to escape that penalty, for all authority belongs to Allāh, the True Reality.

⁷⁹This may refer to Allāh's knowledge of that person and of his preference for his own inclinations or to that person's knowledge of the truth while he refuses it.

⁸⁰Sūrah al-Jāthiyah, 45:23.

⁸¹Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:22.

The Qur'ān reminds that not only is Allāh able to restore justice by punishment of those who deserve it, but for those seeking compensation, He is also the best to grant adequate reward and a pleasing outcome. This prompts believers to work for the eternal benefits of the Hereafter rather than concentrating excessively on the transitory ones of this world.

... Āyah 45 ...

وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلَ الْحَيَاةِ الْدُّنْيَا كَمَا إِنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَأَخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ
هَشِيمًا تَذْرُوهُ الرِّيحُ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّقْتَدِرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

And present to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it⁸² and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allāh is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability.

Life on earth is similar to the gardens that were destroyed in the previous story. Allāh tells His Messenger (ﷺ) to convey to the people that the life of this world can be compared to that of plant life on a desert land. Seeds absorb water from a brief rain, and they soon sprout and become green, fresh and bright. Then just as quickly, the vegetation wilts, dries and disintegrates to become stubble blown about by the wind. The brief phases of growth and decline are described in brief words to further emphasize the concept. A second portrayal is that of a rain producing floods which engulf and destroy the green plant life even before its natural death. Either way, the example serves to illustrate the brevity of worldly existence and that none of it remains indefinitely. All things, including the wealth of the wealthy, will perish in due time, and it is Allāh alone who remains to inherit the earth.⁸³ Bearing in mind the reality of worldly life helps significantly to protect one against the *fitnah* of wealth and children.

... Āyah 46 ...

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الْدُّنْيَا وَالْبَقِيرَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life. But the enduring good deeds are better in the sight of your Lord for reward and better for [one's] hope.

If the majority of people should pin their hopes on wealth and children, believers can expect something far better that endures beyond the count of time – the result of their good deeds, which their Lord has kept for them in the eternal life.

⁸²Absorbs it, growing lush and thick.

⁸³As mentioned in 19:40.

The aspect of permanence is emphasized in the *āyah*'s wording, for *al-bāqiyāt aş-ṣāliḥāt* means literally, "the enduring things: good deeds." Ibn 'Abbās, 'Uthmān bin 'Affān, Sa'eed bin Jubayr and others of the *salaf* (the scholars among our pious predecessors) explained that enduring good deeds are good words, such as *subhān Allāh*, *al-hamdu lillāh*, *lā ilāha ill-Allāh*, *Allāhu akbar*, *lā hawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*, *astaghfirullāh* and asking blessings and peace for the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ). Ibn 'Abbās and others also added, "The five daily prayers, fasting, *hajj*, *ṣadaqah*, freeing slaves, *jihād*, maintaining ties of kinship, and [generally] all other good deeds." As the world becomes increasingly corrupted, believers need to strive to remain constant in worship, righteous conduct and good works.

The same words (*al-bāqiyāt aş-ṣāliḥāt*) are found in *Āyah 76* of *Sūrah Maryam*. Both verses concern those who might be deluded by worldly provisions. Possessions and offspring may be life's adornment, but they are without benefit in themselves; only when they become a means to earn the Lord's approval are they of any true value.

There are countless pleasures desired by men in this life, the greatest of them being wealth and children. Allāh has referred to them here as adornment (*zeenah*), something which enhances life and decorates it, so to speak. Although they are lawful to obtain and enjoy, these blessings should not be taken as a source of self-importance and false pride. In this *āyah*, Allāh puts such worldly advantages into perspective according to the scale of eternity. For while *zeenah* serves an ornamental function, it does not increase the worth or the goodness of the one it adorns. In fact, it is often used to conceal a fault.

Some scholars have pointed out that the distinction made here is not between those who seek the world and those who renounce it. Rather, it is a difference between those who pin their hopes entirely on the world without thought of the Hereafter and those who seek the best of both. The permanent benefit of righteous deeds presented alongside the temporary benefit of wealth, children and the life of the world in general show that there need not be conflict between worldly and spiritual success. The two forms of blessing are evaluated only by their degree of worth and not contrasted as opposites.

Islam does not instruct people to forsake or have aversion to worldly life in order to achieve success in the Hereafter, nor are the two levels of existence independent of one another. Allāh stated in the Qur'ān:

فَمِنْ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا إِاتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلْقٍ
 وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا إِاتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقَنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ
 أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

"And among the people is he who says, 'Our Lord, give us in this world,' and he will have in the Hereafter no share. But among them is he who says, 'Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good and protect us from the punishment of the Fire.' Those will have a share of what they have earned, and Allāh is swift in account."⁸⁴

And the Prophet (ﷺ) would supplicate: "O Allāh, our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good and protect us from the punishment of the Fire."⁸⁵

A believer, therefore, does not renounce the world but aspires to what is good and beneficial therein. He aims for success in both worlds while keeping in mind that the benefits of this world are transient and those of the Hereafter are eternal. What is more, worldly benefits can be used wisely as a means to obtain eternal ones.

... Āyahs 47-48 ...

وَيَوْمَ نُسِيرُ الْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً وَحَشَرْنَاهُمْ فَلَمْ نُغَادِرْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٧﴾ وَعُرِضُوا عَلَى رَبِّكَ صَفَا
لَقَدْ جِئْنُمُونَا كَمَا حَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ بَلْ زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّنَا نَجْعَلَ لَكُمْ مَوْعِدًا ﴿٤٨﴾

And [warn of] the Day when We will remove the mountains and you will see the earth exposed, and We will gather them and not leave behind from them anyone. And they will be presented before your Lord in rows, [and He will say], "You have certainly come to Us just as We created you the first time. But you claimed that We would never make for you an appointment."

Just as there is a fixed term for the existence of every living creature and every inanimate thing, there is also a fixed term for the universe, the end of which will bring on its demise. But Allāh, the Exalted, has promised that it will be followed by a new creation. So while the Last Day means an end to the earth and the entire universe, it is not a final end but marks the beginning of the Hereafter. It is constant consciousness of this coming event that assists believers as they struggle with the tests and trials of worldly life.

Now Allāh speaks of the Day when *al-bāqiyāt aş-ṣāliḥāt*, the enduring good deeds, will have their full significance. He describes some aspects of the Last Day and the gathering of mankind for the Judgement, something from which no one can escape. The earth is now flat and bare, a place where nothing can be hidden. There are no features that anyone can recognize – neither hills nor valleys, buildings nor trees. Everyone created from the beginning until the end of the world has been gathered on this new earth without exception.

⁸⁴Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:200-202.

⁸⁵Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

All the people from countless generations are lined up and reminded that this is the re-creation and return to their Creator which they had been promised, although most of them had denied that it would ever happen.⁸⁶

Many people imagine that life on earth will continue, that death is mere nonexistence, and that the Judgement is a myth. This was true of the disbelievers who openly challenged and ridiculed this concept at the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The Qur'ān replied:

رَعَمَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَن لَّن يُبَعْثُوْأْ قُلْ بَلَى وَرَبِّي لَتُبَعْثُونَ ثُمَّ لَتُبَعْثُونَ بِمَا عَمِلْتُمْ وَذَلِكَ عَلَى

اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ

"The disbelievers claim that they will never be resurrected. Say, 'Yes, [on the contrary], by my Lord. You shall certainly be resurrected; then you will be informed of what you have done. And that is easy for Allāh.'"⁸⁷

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَمْ يَعِيْ بِخَلْقِهِنَّ بِقَدِيرٍ عَلَى أَن
تُحْكِيَ الْمَوْتَى

"Do they not see that Allāh, who created the heavens and earth and was not incapable of their creation, is able to give life to the dead?"⁸⁸

Everyone, including those who denied the Resurrection, will be brought to face their Lord's judgment in a state as helpless as they were when newly born.

... Āyah 49 ...

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَبُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَوَيْلَتَنَا مَالِ هَذَا الْكِتَبِ لَا يُغَادِرُ
صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَنَهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

And the record [of deeds] will be placed [open], and you will see the criminals fearful of that within it, and they will say, "Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?" And they will find what they did present [before them]. And your Lord does injustice to no one.

To the surprise and dismay of the evildoers who denied the account of the Hereafter, the register containing all their deeds will be laid open, and those

⁸⁶Here, the language changes from a description to an address, making the reader or listener a part of the scene.

⁸⁷Sūrah at-Taghābun, 64:7.

⁸⁸Sūrah al-Aḥqāf, 46:33. See also 19:67, 21:104, 29:19-20, 30:27, 36:81, 50:15 and 56:62.

guilty of sinful conduct in pursuit of wealth, power, status, lust or worldly pleasures will be filled with dread and horror at what they see before them. They will find every one of their actions, words, intentions and thoughts recorded, enumerated, confirmed and preserved in the record. Not the least thing will have been left out of it, and long forgotten details will be exposed. Allāh reiterates this fact throughout the Qur’ān with such words as:

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ حَيْرٍ مُّحَضِّرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ

"On the Day every soul will find what it has done of good present [before it] and what it has done of evil..."⁸⁹

يُبَيَّنُوا إِلَى نَاسٍ يَوْمَئِنْ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخْرَى

"Man will be informed that Day of what he sent ahead and what he kept back."⁹⁰

يَوْمَ تُبَلَّى الْسَّرَّايرُ

"The Day when secrets will be put on trial."⁹¹

Every secret is now exposed and every sin committed is now there before them, and they find themselves trapped and terrified with no chance to appeal or to escape. They can only acknowledge that Allāh will be completely just in His judgement of them.⁹²

One might think that some of his evil and dishonest acts will be forgotten over time, but it is not the case with the Creator, whose knowledge encompasses all times and events. In fact, it is so complete and absolute that He is not in need of records. But they are kept and presented to each individual at the time of Judgement as undeniable proof to that person of what he had earned and justly deserves.

Moreover, Allāh has disclosed:

وَنَصَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَمَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا

"And We place the scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be treated unjustly at all."⁹³

And He said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ

⁸⁹Sūrah Āli ‘Imrān, 3:30.

⁹⁰Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:13.

⁹¹Sūrah at-Tāriq, 86:9.

⁹²And while none will be punished unjustly, many believers will be forgiven.

⁹³Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:47.

"Indeed Allāh does not do injustice [even] as much as an atom's weight..."⁹⁴

Jābir bin ‘Abdullāh reported: "I was told of a *hadīth* that a man had heard from the Prophet (ﷺ), so I bought a camel, saddled it and traveled on it a month until I reached ash-Shām and found ‘Abdullah bin Unays. I said to the gatekeeper, 'Tell him Jābir is at the door.' He said, 'Ibn ‘Abdullāh?' I said, 'Yes.' He came out, pulling down his garment; he embraced me and I embraced him. Then I said, 'I was told you narrated a *hadīth* that you heard from the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) about legal retribution, and I was afraid that you or I might die before I could hear it.' He said, 'I heard the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) say, "Allāh will gather the people on the Day of Resurrection naked, uncircumcised and having nothing with them. Then He will call them with a voice that will be heard by those distant, just as it will be heard by those near: 'I am the Sovereign, I am the Judge. No one of the people of Hell shall enter Hell while he is owed a right by one of the people of Paradise until I take it from him, and no one of the people of Paradise shall enter Paradise while he is owed a right by one of the people of Hell until I take it from him – even if only a slap.'" We asked, 'How [can it be], when we come before Allāh barefooted, naked, uncircumcised and having nothing with us?' He said, 'With *hasanāt* and *sayyi’āt*.'"⁹⁵

The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) also said, "All rights will be returned to their owners on the Day of Resurrection – [so much that] even the hornless sheep will take retribution from the horned one."⁹⁶

... Āyahs 50-51 ...

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلملائِكَةِ أَسْجُدُوا لِأَدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِي وَهُمْ لَكُمْ عُدُوٌّ بَئْسَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا ﴿٥٠﴾ مَا أَشَهَدُهُمْ حَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَا حَلْقَ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَمَا كُنْتُ مُتَّخِذَ الْمُضِلِّينَ عَصْدًا ﴿٥١﴾

And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except for Iblees. He was of the jinn and departed⁹⁷ from the command of his Lord. Then will you take him and his descendants as allies other than Me while they are enemies to you? Wretched it is for the wrongdoers as an exchange. I did not make them witness to the creation of

⁹⁴Sūrah *an-Nisā'*, 4:40.

⁹⁵i.e., accounts will be settled by the exchange of good and bad deeds. Narrated by Ahmad – *ṣaheeh*.

⁹⁶Narrated by Muslim.

⁹⁷The verb *fasaqa* means departed, left or went beyond the limit, and alludes to disobedience. The same word is used in Arabic to describe a date emerging from its blossom or a mouse emerging from its hole to cause damage.

the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken the misguiders as assistants.

Allāh (ﷻ) briefly reminds mankind that Iblees (Satan), who refused obedience to Him and vowed to mislead any he could of the human race, continues to use his offspring as agents to seduce them at every opportunity. Another *āyah* warns:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُوا حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ الْسَّعِيرِ

"Indeed, Satan is an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy. He only invites his party to be among the companions of the Blaze."⁹⁸

The verse of this *sūrah* states that Iblees was from among the *jinn*. He was not himself an angel⁹⁹ but merely was present among them at the time of Allāh's command; and then he refused to comply out of pride and conceit. Commentators mention that Iblees resembled the angels by his apparent devotion and worship so he was included in the address, but then his true nature betrayed him and he disobeyed the command of his Lord out of envy and resentment.

Al-Hasan al-Baṣrī commented, "Iblees was never one of the angels, even for an instant. He is the father of the *jinn*, just as Ādam is the father of mankind." Iblees rebelled and disobeyed Allāh, while it is impossible for an angel to disobey Him given that angels were created to serve Allāh and have no desires or will of their own. The *jinn*, however, were granted a free will to choose and act as they prefer, similar to humans.

And among the attributes of angels is that they were created from light, while the *jinn* were created from smokeless fire. This was stated by the Prophet (ﷻ) in an authentic *ḥadīth*.¹⁰⁰ It is also mentioned in the Qur'ān that Iblees was created from fire,¹⁰¹ indicating that he was of the *jinn*. However, the strongest evidence is in the clear statement in this verse.

Those Makkans and others who allowed Satan to lead them to denial of Allāh's Messenger (ﷻ) and rebellion against their all-powerful Creator did so because they supposed, like the wealthy owner of the garden, that the favors of wealth, status and authority in this life would endure and that they would never be held accountable. To them, like the unbelievers of every generation, death

⁹⁸*Sūrah Fātir*, 35:6.

⁹⁹As alleged in unauthenticated reports based on Jewish sources (*Isrā'eeliyyāt*).

¹⁰⁰Narrated by Muslim, Aḥmad, al-Bayhaqī and Ibn Ḥibbān.

¹⁰¹This is what Iblees himself declared when Allāh asked him the reason for his refusal to prostrate to Ādam. He said: "**I am better than him. You created me from fire, and created him from clay.**" (7:12 and 38:76) Iblees had become rebellious out of envy and assumed an air of superiority. His arrogance was based merely on an attribute of his creation in which he himself had no role; thus, Iblees became the first racist.

was an obvious reality; but it was seen as the end of one's existence on earth and nothing more. It is not difficult for Iblees and his assistants to persuade such people to "get the most out of life" by any means, lawful or unlawful, using the slogan, "You live only once."

It is obviously not in one's best interest to take his enemy as an ally. Allāh has mentioned in the Qur'ān that the devils who do the work of Iblees may be either from among the *jinn* or from mankind.¹⁰² Though an agent of Iblees will initially appear to someone as a friend and supporter, as soon as his follower falls into difficulties, he will abandon him. Thus, the Qur'ān directs believers to befriend other believers and to avoid associating with those who mislead others and encourage disobedience of their Lord.

The all-powerful Creator reproaches those who have foolishly allowed devils to delude them into associating others with Him. For it is He alone who creates and manages all things, having no need of a partner, associate, advisor or intermediary. Idols and other creations worshipped by men had no share in any of that. They could not have witnessed the creation of the heavens and earth simply because they did not exist at the time of their creation. In fact, they did not witness the creation of anything, not even themselves. Allāh instructed His Messenger (ﷺ) to challenge all such polytheists:

قُلِ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ رَعَمْتُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا هُمْ بِهِمْ مِنْ ظَاهِرٍ

"Say, [O Muḥammad], 'Invoke those you claim [as deities] besides Allāh.' They do not possess an atom's weight [of ability] in the heavens or on the earth, and they do not have therein any partnership [with Him], nor is there for Him from among them any assistant."¹⁰³

Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, is not in need of anyone or anything of His creation. He is all-powerful and competent to accomplish whatever He wills alone. And further, because He has denied and refused any association with those who use their influence to misguide humanity, they are surely unworthy to be followed by men.

... Āyahs 52-53 ...

وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ نَادُوا شُرَكَاءِي الَّذِينَ رَعَمْتُمْ فَدَعَوْهُمْ فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِبُوْا لَهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَوْبِقاً
وَرَءَاءَ الْمُجْرِمُونَ النَّارَ فَطَنُوا أَهْنَمْ مُوَاقِعُوهَا وَلَمْ يَجِدُوا عَنْهَا مَصْرِفًا

¹⁰² Refer to 6:112 and 114:6.

¹⁰³ *Sūrah Saba'*, 34:22.

And [warn of] the Day when He will say, "Call My 'partners' whom you claimed," and they will invoke them, but they will not respond to them. And We will put between them [a valley of] destruction. And the criminals will see the Fire and will be certain that they are to fall therein. And they will not find from it a way out.

Allāh warns of that Day in which He will challenge everyone who had committed *shirk* to call upon those beings they once imagined as having a share in His divinity to assist them and save them from punishment; but they will not respond. Indeed, they could not have aided them even during the worldly life, and now their assistance is all the more impossible.¹⁰⁴ For the ones they considered as partners (comparable with Allāh) are but creations like themselves, unable to act unless their Lord should will. And now He has placed an unbridgeable gulf of devastation, horror and misery between the worshippers and those that they had worshipped beside Him or instead of Him – an abyss of fire.

As they see the Hellfire being dragged forth by seventy thousand reins, each pulled by seventy thousand angels,¹⁰⁵ it will intensify their fear. The anticipation of torment is in itself a torment. As they observe with their own eyes what awaits them, they know for certain that they are bound to descend into it. Filled with horror and dread of that inevitable fate, they see no way of escape.

... Āyah 54 ...

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَذَا الْقُرْءَانِ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ وَكَانَ أَلِّإِنْسَنُ أَكْثَرُ شَيْءٍ جَدَلًا

And We have certainly diversified in this Qur’ān for the people from every [kind of] example; but man has ever been, most of anything, [prone to] dispute.

Allāh (ﷻ) mentions the comprehensive nature of His final revelation – that He provided therein clear details of important matters so that men would not deviate from the truth or the path of guidance. He conveyed in the Qur’ān every means for the acquisition of beneficial knowledge leading to the avoidance of harm and attainment of eternal happiness. It contains facts, illustrations and explanations of a variety of subjects, addressing the needs and concerns of diverse peoples during their existence in this world. The Creator's message has been delivered in extensive and varied contexts which complete and confirm one another and are proof of its divine origin. Similarly, Allāh said:

وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبَيَّنَأً لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَنُشِّرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

¹⁰⁴ Refer also to 6:94.

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned in a *hadīth* narrated by Muslim.

"And We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things and as guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims."¹⁰⁶

But blind attachment to tradition, obstinacy, pride, and other human failings causes many men to reject reason and truth and to remain persistently argumentative. The word *jadal* conveys the impression of disputing in a contentious manner with stubborn adherence to one's own position and disregard for truth and reason. It is often a means of showing off – argument merely for the sake of argument.

This tendency may surface unconsciously at times, even among the best of people. 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib related that one night the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ came to see him and Fātimah as they were going to bed. He said, "Are you not going to pray [at night]?" 'Alī said, "I answered, 'O Messenger of Allāh, our souls are in the hand of Allāh. If He wills to awaken us, He will awaken us.' He left when I said that without answering me. Then as he was walking away, I heard him slap his thigh and say, '**But man has ever been, most of anything, [prone to] dispute.**'"¹⁰⁷

Differences of opinion are inevitable among human beings on account of their differences in intelligence, comprehension, insight, analytic capacity and education in particular fields of knowledge. And while this verse points out humanity's argumentative nature, the criticism becomes a directive to overcome that nature through discipline. When parties observe correct standards and appropriate ethics in expressing and managing their differences, there can be positive results.¹⁰⁸

Despite their divergence in views, the early scholars avoided *jadal* and accepted from one another what was based on evidence. It was seen as a source of benefit which contributed to the development of Islamic jurisprudence, confirmed the relevance of Islam to changing circumstances, and maintained public welfare. It was later on that differences became a source of disunity and internal strife among the ignorant, wasting much of the energy and potential of the *ummah* and causing people to become occupied with matters undeserving the attention afforded them.

Believers are instructed to use reason and good manners when disagreements arise and when inviting people to truth. Allāh has said:

¹⁰⁶ *Sūrah an-Nahl*, 16:89.

¹⁰⁷ Ahmad, al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Ibn Taymiyyah commented that this *hadīth* is evidence that attributing one's own negligence to destiny is something blameworthy.

¹⁰⁸ But when the norms of ethical regulation are not observed, disagreements degenerate into disputes and schisms and become an evil negative force. Unfortunately, many Muslims today have lost sight of Islāmic ethics in dealing with their differences, a situation that calls for both admonition and education.

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ أَدْفَعَ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا أَلَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ
كَانَهُ وَلِي حَمِيمٌ

"And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that which is better; and thereupon, the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend."¹⁰⁹

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَدِلُهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best."¹¹⁰

Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) himself was instructed:

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُوكُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي

"Say, 'This is my way; I invite to Allāh with insight – I and those who follow me.'"¹¹¹

The early scholars of this *ummah*, following the precedent of the *ṣahābah* and *tābi‘een*, adhered steadfastly to Islamic norms of behavior during argumentation, and each was prepared to listen attentively to the other side. They exerted every effort to investigate an issue sincerely and objectively with respect for the other opinion, and were willing to consider the evidences and arguments of those who disagreed with their own. This would leave no option but to either accept the other point of view or offer stronger evidences.

... Āyah 55 ...

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَن يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَّا أَن تَأْتِيهِمْ سُنَّةُ الْأَوَّلِينَ أَوْ يَأْتِيهِمْ

الْعَذَابُ قُبْلًا

And nothing has prevented the people from believing when guidance came to them and from asking forgiveness of their Lord except that there [must] befall them the [accustomed] precedent of the former peoples or that the punishment should come [directly] before them.

This is the situation of those people who denied the truth brought by Allāh's prophets and messengers and persisted in disbelief. Ibn Katheer said, "Allāh is telling us about the rebellion of the disbelievers in ancient times and in more

¹⁰⁹ *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:34.

¹¹⁰ *Sūrah an-Nahl*, 16:125.

¹¹¹ *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:108.

recent times – how they rejected the obvious truth even when they witnessed clear signs and proofs. What stopped them from following it was only their demand to set eyes on the punishment of which they were being warned."

When Allāh's messengers invited earlier nations to faith and morality, they encountered all manner of denial and rejection. Obstinate and arrogant, most of the people would not repent or reform but instead mocked and ridiculed the prophets. They would challenge them to produce the punishment they had been warned of, showing that they had no fear of Allāh and considered it highly unlikely that He would ever punish them. They confronted their prophets with such words as:

فَأَتَنَا بِمَا تَعْدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْصَّادِقِينَ

"So bring us what you have promised us, if you should be of the truthful."¹¹²

فَأَسْقِطْ عَلَيْنَا كِسْفًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْصَّادِقِينَ

"So cause to fall upon us fragments of the sky, if you should be of the truthful."¹¹³

أَئْتِنَا بِعَذَابِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْصَّادِقِينَ

"Bring us the punishment of Allāh, if you should be of the truthful."¹¹⁴

Similarly, the disbelievers of Quraysh sarcastically supplicated:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كَانَ هَذَا هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ فَأَمْطِرْ عَلَيْنَا حِجَارَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ أَوْ أَئْتِنَا
بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

"O Allāh, if this is indeed the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment."¹¹⁵

Such people were certainly deserving of punishment, for such expressions are those of confrontation by contemptuous unbelievers. In contrast, fear of their Lord's anger and certainty of His power to punish causes people of faith to plead continually for His forgiveness and mercy. Allāh mentions this fact in the Qur'ān:

يَسْتَعْجِلُهَا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ هَذَا وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مُشْفِقُونَ مِنْهَا وَيَعْلَمُونَ
أَنَّهَا أَلْحَقُ

¹¹² Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:70; Sūrah Hūd, 11:32 and Sūrah al-Aḥqāf, 46:22.

¹¹³ Sūrah ash-Shu'arā', 26:187.

¹¹⁴ Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:29.

¹¹⁵ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:32.

"Those who do not believe in it call for its immediate onset, but those who believe are fearful of it and know that it is the truth."¹¹⁶

Among the natural laws of cause and effect established by the Creator is the consequence of human behavior, both in this world and the next. The Qur'ān mentions this in several verses, such as:

سُنَّةَ مَنْ قَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنَا وَلَا تَجِدُ لِسُنَّتِنَا تَحْوِيلًا

"[That is Our] established way for those We had sent before you of Our messengers; and you will not find in Our way any alteration."¹¹⁷

سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ حَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةَ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا

"[This is] the established way of Allāh with those who passed on before; and you will not find in the way of Allāh any change."¹¹⁸

According to this eternal law, all nations that did not accept the invitation to worship Allāh and persisted in evil and disbelief were destroyed at a time decreed by Him. So when a divine message was sent to past communities and people continued to oppose truth and spread corruption after ample warning, the means of their destruction was activated. The Qur'ān states that this consequence is inevitable and cannot be altered or delayed. It is a grave warning to the rebellious unbelievers of the Prophet's time and to those of all times to come.

... Āyah 56 ...

وَمَا نُرِسِّلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَجَنِيدِلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِالْبَطْلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ
وَأَنْتَخَذُوا إِيمَانِي وَمَا أَنْذِرُوا هُزُوا

And We send not the messengers except as bringers of good tidings and warners. And those who disbelieve dispute by [using] falsehood to [attempt to] invalidate thereby the truth and have taken My verses and that of which they are warned in ridicule.

With the creation of mankind, the Creator sent prophets and messengers periodically to every nation to teach His religion and invalidate deviant belief systems. They invited the disbelievers in a variety of ways to believe in Allāh and abide by His laws and moral standards. But throughout history, false beliefs and practices have become entrenched in societies and people have opposed true religion, defending popular customs, promoting their own wellbeing and

¹¹⁶Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:18.

¹¹⁷Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:77.

¹¹⁸Sūrah al-Ahzāb, 33:62. See also: 15:10-13, 35:42-43, 40:85 and 48:23.

oppressing others. It has always been in the interest of tyrants to prevent the positive influence of religion's morality.

The truth is clear, but its opponents resort to false arguments and doubletalk in an effort to refute it. Societies based upon unbelief have resorted to a variety of methods to prevent the divinely revealed truth from spreading. They not only plotted to harm or kill the prophets of Allāh but slandered and insulted them, attempting to discredit the message they conveyed.¹¹⁹ They exerted every effort to weaken the truth with their false arguments but could not accomplish that. Even when demanding to see Allāh's miracles or His punishment, they did not wish to be convinced. Their approach was dishonest, and their challenge was an evil one destined to end in ultimate loss. For at a time decreed by Him, the Lord of creation will deal severely with those who have striven to lead others away from His straight path.

... Āyah 57 ...

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذَكَرَ بِيَأْيَتِ رَبِّهِ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا وَنَسِيَ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً
أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي ءَاذَانِهِمْ وَقُرْآنًا وَإِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ فَلَنْ يَهْتَدُو وَإِذَا أَبْدَأُ

And who is more unjust than one who is reminded of the verses of his Lord but turns away from them and forgets what his hands have put forth? Indeed, We have placed over their hearts coverings lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness. And if you invite them to guidance – they will never be guided, then – ever.

The Qur'ān confirms that none exceeds the wickedness of those to whom Allāh's message is conveyed but they ignore it, heedless of all the evil they have accumulated throughout their lives. As a consequence of their hatred for truth, malicious intent and immoral conduct, Allāh covers and seals their hearts, preventing the light of His guidance from penetrating them. In order for guidance to enter a heart, it must be open and receptive. So when one deliberately closes his ears and his heart to Allāh's guidance, He covers them with darkness, depriving that person of guidance in consequence of his own choice. Other verses confirm this, such as:

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَرِهِمْ غِشَوةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

"Allāh has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment."¹²⁰

¹¹⁹Today, the unbelieving world opposes believers in an essentially hostile, mocking and condescending manner, and those who struggle to keep the faith frequently become targets of demonization and ridicule.

¹²⁰Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:7. The "veil" is a covering preventing them from discerning guidance.

And Allāh informed His Prophet (ﷺ):

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَسْتَمِعُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكْنَةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي ءَاذَانِهِمْ وَقَرَأَ وَإِنْ يَرَوْا كُلَّ ءَايَةٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَا

"And among them are those who listen to you, but We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness. And if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it."¹²¹

Allāh has revealed that such people can never be guided, and this is the result of their arrogance and persistence in sin. They will wage war against His religion and dominate the world for a brief moment, after which they will return to the eternal wrath of their Lord.

... Āyah 58 ...

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَفُورُ ذُو الْرَّحْمَةِ لَوْ يُؤَاخِذُهُمْ بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَعَذَابٌ بَلْ لَهُمْ مَوْعِدٌ لَنْ تَجِدُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ مَوْبِلاً ﴿٥٨﴾

And your Lord is the Forgiving, full of mercy. If He were to impose blame upon them for what they earned, He would have hastened for them the punishment. Rather, for them is an appointment from which they will never find an escape.

The first sentence of this āyah is similar to the one which says:

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَىٰ ظَهِيرَهَا مِنْ ذَآبَةٍ

"And if Allāh were to impose blame on the people for what they have earned, He would not leave upon it [i.e., the earth] any creature."¹²²

But Allāh is ever Forgiving and Merciful, so if any of the wrongdoers should repent and reform before the end of their term on earth, they will find Him pleased and accepting of them. Allāh does not punish people immediately but conceals their faults for a time and may guide some of them to belief and righteousness, knowing that there is goodness in their hearts. He is benevolent and forbearing, giving them lifelong opportunities to turn back to Him in repentance.

The generous Lord offers the earth's gifts to everyone. Atheists, hypocrites and idol worshippers can all enjoy benefits in this life, from the air they breathe

¹²¹ Sūrah al-An‘ām, 6:25.

¹²² Sūrah Fātir, 35:45.

and the water they drink to every form of wealth and luxury. Allāh provides them with food, health, power and adornment. He gives them goods and properties, homes and offspring. And He permits them to possess and benefit from these gifts that they might turn to Him in appreciation and gratitude. Yet, He knows that while some will eventually repent and be forgiven, many of them will remain wicked and undeserving of guidance.

People should not be deluded by the respite they are given on earth, for their term will inevitably come to an end. There is a predetermined lifetime for every nation and every individual, and each is decreed by its Creator, who has said:

ما تَسْبِقُ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلَهَا وَمَا يَسْتَخِرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

"No nation will precede its time [of termination], nor will they remain [thereafter]."¹²³

وَلَنْ يُؤَخِّرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَجَلُهَا وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

"And never will Allāh delay a soul when its time has come. And Allāh is Aware of what you do."¹²⁴

And He warned:

وَلَا تَحْسِبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُمْلِي لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لَا نَفْسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمْلِي لَهُمْ لِيَزَدُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

"And let not those who disbelieve ever think that [because] We extend their time it is better for them. We only extend it for them so that they may increase in sin, and for them is a humiliating punishment."¹²⁵

Allāh has also predetermined the time of compensation for those who deny the Account and the Judgement – an inescapable appointment. The laws ordained by Allāh for His creation will not change, and He leaves no promise unfulfilled.

... Āyah 59 ...

وَتَلَكَ الْقُرَى أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا وَجَعَلْنَا لِمَهْلِكِهِمْ مَوْعِدًا ﴿١٢٦﴾

And those cities – We destroyed them when they wronged, and We made for their destruction an appointed time.

¹²³ *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn*, 23:43.

¹²⁴ *Sūrah al-Munāfiqūn*, 63:11.

¹²⁵ *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān*, 3:178.

The earthquake, flood, internal strife or whatever disaster that will destroy a nation has been decreed by Allāh. He has mentioned in the Qur’ān examples of civilizations that persecuted believers and were destroyed or replaced by others after an appointed period of time. For example, the reign of terror that drove the believing youths to seek refuge in the cave did not last much more than 300 years.

The temporary existence of tyrannical regimes is part of the trial that Allāh creates for believers during their life on earth. But oppressors will surely meet their punishment. Every nation that opposes Allāh's religion and law will be granted an interval of existence, but it is brief in comparison to the eternal life where the balance of justice will be completely restored. In this verse Allāh confirms that destruction has befallen all who opposed Him, a warning that people should beware of rejecting His greatest, most noble and final Messenger (ﷺ). And His wrath and punishment should be feared.

... Āyah 60 ...

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِفَتَنَةٌ لَا أَبْرُحُ حَتَّىٰ أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقْبًا

And [mention] when Mūsā said to his boy [i.e., servant], "I will not cease [traveling] until I reach the junction of the two seas or continue for a long period."

Here begins the story of Prophet Mūsā and Khidhr.¹²⁶ It is neither related nor alluded to anywhere else in the Qur’ān. There is no mention in these verses of when or where this encounter took place, other than at "**the junction of the two seas.**" The *sūrah* does not mention the name of Khidhr¹²⁷ or his position – whether he was a prophet, a scholar or a man favored by Allāh for deep faith and dedication to His cause. These omissions are intended, as additional details would only serve to distract one from the essence of the story.

Allāh had informed Mūsā (ﷺ) that there was a man who possessed more knowledge than he did, and if he wished to meet that man, he would have to travel until he reached the place where the two seas merged. Mūsā expressed his determination to do so. He promptly set out with his young servant¹²⁸ to find the man more learned than himself, and he traveled with the firm resolve to pursue the effort no matter how long it might take to reach that destination. ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Amr suggested that *huqaban* (for a long period) meant a length of eighty years; Mujāhid said seventy years; and Ibn ‘Abbās said the duration of a lifetime – all of them similar in meaning. However, the emphasis of this verse is on the strength of Mūsā's determination rather than the period of time.

¹²⁶In Arabic: Khadhir or al-Khadhir. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "He was named thus because after he sat on a barren white ground, it became green with vegetation." (Narrated by al-Bukhārī)

¹²⁷This has been determined from *hadīths*.

¹²⁸Joshua (Yūsha‘ bin Nūn), who is said to have succeeded Mūsā as leader of Banī Isrā’el after his death.

... Āyah 61 ...

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنِهِمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا ﴿٦١﴾

But when they reached the junction between them, they forgot their fish, and it took its course into the sea, slipping away.

Allāh informed Prophet Mūsā that he would meet the learned man at a point in his journey where they would lose a fish they carried in a basket. Ibn Katheer related: "He had been commanded to carry a salted fish with him and told that when he lost the fish, it would be a sign he had reached the intended place. So they set out and traveled until they reached the junction of the two seas, where there was a spring called 'Ayn al-Ḥayāh (the Spring of Life). Whenever its water touched something, it brought it to life. They fell asleep there, and the fish felt some drops of that water and came back to life.¹²⁹ It was in a basket with Yūsha‘, and it began to move and jumped out of the basket [moving] towards the sea. Yūsha‘ awoke and the fish fell into the water and began to swim, making a channel in the water." Mūsā was asleep when the fish miraculously escaped and made its way into the sea, but the boy had awakened in time to see it. This was but a preview of the astonishing incidents to come.

... Āyah 62 ...

فَلَمَّا جَاءَوْزًا قَالَ لِفَتَنَةٍ إِذَا غَدَاءَنَا لَقَدْ لَقِيَتَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصْبًا ﴿٦٢﴾

So when they had passed beyond it, [Mūsā] said to his boy, "Bring us our morning meal. We have certainly suffered in this, our journey, [much] fatigue."

To reach the intended meeting place, Mūsā and his young servant had traveled for some time. That morning they continued on the journey, unaware of having passed their destination. After they had walked a distance beyond the point where the fish had disappeared, Mūsā told his servant to take out their morning meal as the journey had become tiring and difficult. When relating the story, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) mentioned that Mūsā did not notice his exhaustion until after he had passed the point which Allāh had made known to him.¹³⁰

... Āyahs 63-64 ...

قَالَ أَرَيْتَ إِذْ أَوْيَنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيْتُ الْحُوتَ وَمَا أَنْسَنِيْهِ إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنَّ أَذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ﴿٦٣﴾ قَالَ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغِ فَارْتَدَّا عَلَى ءاثَارِهِمَا قَصَصًا ﴿٦٤﴾

¹²⁹Other commentators have said that it was water from the sea which brought the fish to life. In any case, it was a miraculous occurrence; and Allāh knows best.

¹³⁰Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

He said, "Did you see when we retired to the rock? Indeed, I forgot [there] the fish. And none made me forget it except Satan – that I should mention it. And it took its course into the sea amazingly." [Mūsā] said, "That is what we were seeking." So they returned, following their footprints.

The moment Mūsā and his young servant thought about preparing their meal, they remembered the fish and realized that they had left it behind. And they remembered that they forgot the fish at the rock where they had rested. The servant boy realized his error and that Satan had caused him to forget about the fish and continue on a path that was no longer the right one.¹³¹ So they retraced their steps in order to return to the rock where the fish had disappeared.

While forgetting is attributed to both of them (in *Āyah* 61), some commentators state that it was in fact Yūsha‘ who forgot. Others are of the opinion that they both forgot but that the boy showed good manners by attributing blame only to himself and to Satan. Some scholars added the conclusion that as soon as a believer becomes conscious that he is following a wrong path (in his beliefs or actions), he should do the same, i.e., return to the correct one.

... Āyahs 65-66 ...

فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا إِاتَّيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ﴿٦٥﴾ قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَيْتُكَ عَلَيَّ أَنْ تُعْلِمَنِ مِمَّا عُلِّمْتَ رُشْدًا ﴿٦٦﴾

And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom We had given mercy from Us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge. Mūsā said to him, "May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?"

Upon returning to the rock where they had rested, they found Khidhr,¹³² the man to whom Allāh had granted mercy and knowledge directly from Himself. Allāh had given him knowledge which He had not given to Mūsā, and He had given Mūsā knowledge which He had not given to Khidhr.

The scholars have differed about whether or not Khidhr was a prophet. Some say that it may be understood from particular verses that the mercy mentioned here is the mercy of prophethood and that the knowledge which came from Allāh was that of revelation (*wahi*). Those who adopted this view base it on Khidhr's words in *Āyah* 82: "**And I did it not of my own accord.**" They

¹³¹The fact that Satan may cause someone to forget (by Allāh's permission) is mentioned in 6:68 and 12:42. Otherwise, how could he or anyone have forgotten such an amazing occurrence?

¹³²The fish's escape is now seen to be a clear sign pinpointing the exact location of the meeting. When Mūsā and his servant retraced their steps, they found the learned man at that very spot. Had they traveled on, they would undoubtedly have missed him.

assume that there is no way for the directives of Allāh to be known except through revelation from Him. Another factor cited is that Mūsā asked to accompany him in order to acquire some of his knowledge.

However, it is also known that the bestowal of mercy and knowledge by Allāh can be more general, in ways other than through prophethood. The fact that something general exists does not necessarily imply that something more specific exists. Scholars who deny that he was a prophet base their view on the words of Allāh in Āyah 65: "**And they found a servant from among Our servants...**" They conclude that he was no more than a servant of Allāh in view of the fact that this is how the Qur’ān describes him; and Allāh knows best.¹³³

Prophet Mūsā addressed the learned man in a respectful manner and made his request in clear and straightforward language. He asked if he could be allowed to accompany Khidhr and spend time with him in order to learn something of that which Allāh had taught him. The question is phrased in a modest way without coercion, the manner in which a seeker of knowledge addresses a scholar.

... Āyahs 67-68 ...

فَالِّيْكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِعَ مَعِي صَبِرًا ﴿٦٧﴾ وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحَظَّ بِهِ خُبْرًا ﴿٦٨﴾

He said, "Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience. And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge?"

Khidhr replied that Mūsā would not be able to have patience with him. He knew that Mūsā would witness things about which he had no understanding. People can usually deal with only the apparent aspects of things and tend to interpret them according to their own perspective. Ibn Katheer explains Khidhr's reply as meaning: You will not be able to accompany me when you see me doing what is contrary to your law because I have knowledge from Allāh that He has not taught you, although you have knowledge from Allāh that He has not taught me. Each one of us has been charged by Allāh with matters which the other has not. And how can you have patience with what you do not know? I know that you will denounce me justifiably [from your own point of view], but you do not have knowledge of the hidden wisdom and benefit behind these particular matters as I have.

This was part of the knowledge Allāh had granted to Khidhr for a purpose intended by Him. Mūsā had an impulsive nature, which is alluded to throughout the Qur’ān. He could not be expected to be patient with the unusual deeds of Khidhr, despite the fact that he was a prophet and messenger chosen by Allāh.

¹³³The view has also been expressed that Khidhr was an angel, exempted from the laws imposed by Allāh on human beings. However, there is nothing to suggest this in the Sunnah.

Patience results from comprehension of the benefit behind particular acts and occurrences. Hence, Allāh commands people to act upon knowledge in dealing with the various circumstances and situations that confront them. People of knowledge are those who are capable of looking at matters from perspectives of which others are not aware.

... Āyahs 69-70 ...

فَالَّذِي قَالَ سَتَجْدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا ﴿٦٩﴾ قَالَ فَإِنِّي أَتَبْعَثُنَّكَ فَلَا تَسْأَلْنِي عَنْ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ
أُحْدِثَ لَكَ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٧٠﴾

[Mūsā] said, "You will find me, if Allāh wills, patient, and I will not disobey you in [any] order." He said, "Then if you follow me, do not ask me about anything until I make to you about it mention [i.e., explanation]."

Mūsā was so eager to learn that he resolved to be patient and obedient. But he placed the will of Allāh before his own resolve by saying "*in shā Allāh*." This is the proper manner, as Allāh reminded Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in Āyahs 23 and 24.

Discipline and perseverance are the keys to obtaining knowledge, and a humble attitude is appropriate for the one who seeks it. Because he was both modest and realistic, Mūsā attributed ability to the will of his Lord when declaring his intention to practice patience. Khidhr informed Mūsā that in order to accompany him, he would have to comply with one condition: that he not question him or initiate discussion on any matter until he himself had mentioned it. This indicated that he would eventually explain to Mūsā the underlying wisdom of what he did at the appropriate time; therefore he should remain patient.

... Āyahs 71-73 ...

فَانطَّلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا ﴿٧١﴾ قَالَ أَخْرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا ﴿٧٢﴾ قَالَ أَلَمْ
أَقْلِ إِنِّي لَكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِعَ مَعِي صَبَرًا ﴿٧٣﴾ قَالَ لَا تُؤَاخِذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيْتُ وَلَا تُرْهِقْنِي مِنْ أَمْرِي عُسْرًا ﴿٧٤﴾

So they set out, until when they had embarked on the ship, he [i.e., Khidhr] tore it open. [Mūsā] said, "Have you torn it open to drown its people?"¹³⁴ You have certainly done a grave thing." [Khidhr] said, "Did I not say that with me you would never be able to have patience?" [Mūsā] said, "Do not blame me for what I forgot and do not overwhelm me in my matter with difficulty."

¹³⁴i.e., thereby allowing its people to drown. The grammatical structure of this sentence in Arabic implies that this was the consequence, not the purpose, of his action.

After they had agreed upon the stated condition, Mūsā and Khidhr set out on a journey, walking along the coast. They were in need of a boat to carry them and waved to one that was passing near the shore. The crew recognized Khidhr, and in honor of him took them on board free of charge. Once they were at sea some distance from the shore, Khidhr got up and damaged the ship, tearing out one of its planks and then replacing it. By all appearance, it was an act exposing the passengers to the risk of being drowned. Why would anyone, let alone a learned and devout man, do such a thing?

Mūsā could not restrain himself from expressing his disapproval of this seemingly destructive act. By so doing he confirmed the fact of his impatience due to inadequate knowledge. Sayyid Qutb commented, "A human being may accept something when it is discussed in abstract terms, but when he deals with it in reality and perceives its consequence, his reaction may be totally different. Mūsā had been warned that he might find certain things unacceptable and yet resolved to remain patient. However, when faced with a real situation, he lost that patience."

Admitting he had forgotten his promise, Mūsā requested that his mistake be overlooked. From his words, "**Do not overwhelm me in my matter with difficulty,**" it may be understood that he did not want his opportunity for learning to be terminated. Khidhr accepted his apology, and they continued on their way.

... Āyahs 74-76 ...

فَانطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَمًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتَلْتَ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُكَرًا ﴿٧٤﴾
 قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقْلُ لَكَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِعَ مَعِي صَبَرًا ﴿٧٥﴾ قَالَ إِنْ سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَهَا فَلَا تُصَحِّبِنِي
 قَدْ بَلَغْتَ مِنْ لَدُنِي عُذْرًا ﴿٧٦﴾

So they set out, until when they met a boy, he killed him. [Mūsā] said, "Have you killed a pure soul for other than [having killed] a soul? You have certainly done a deplorable thing." [Khidhr] said, "Did I not tell you that with me you would never be able to have patience?" [Mūsā] said, "If I should ask you about anything after this, then do not keep me as a companion. You have obtained from me an excuse."

They set out once again, and upon finding a young boy, Khidhr killed him. This boy had been playing with other boys, and Khidhr deliberately singled him out. When Mūsā saw this, he was shaken and denounced it with more passion than in the previous case. The first incident had exposed the ship and its passengers to danger. Now there was the purposeful murder of a boy with no apparent provocation or justification. And considering his young age, he could not even be held accountable for misdeeds he may have committed. Mūsā could not contain himself from condemnation of this apparently evil deed.

Khidhr again reminded him, this time in stronger terms,¹³⁵ that he was not capable of patience without understanding. Mūsā had to acknowledge that he had broken his promise again despite the reminders. When Khidhr reproached him a second time for his impatience, Mūsā could not have answered by accusing him of acting in an unlawful manner. For he knew inwardly that there was a purpose to these actions, and it was for this reason that Allāh had brought him here. Moreover, he could not reasonably have repeated the excuse of forgetfulness, and his regret made him apologetic to the point that he was unable to justify himself further.

Hence, Mūsā finally offered that he would accept dismissal in case he should commit the same error again. Giving himself one final chance, he agreed that should he lose patience a third time, it would be reasonable to relieve Khidhr of the burden of his companionship. In so doing he was to deprive himself of a prolonged relationship with the learned man – a difficult sacrifice.

... Āyahs 77-78 ...

فَانطَلَقا حَتَّى إِذَا آتَيَا أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ أُسْتَطَعُمَا أَهْلَهَا فَأَبْوَا أَن يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَن يَنْقَضَ فَأَقَامَهُ ﴿٧٧﴾ قَالَ لَوْ شِئْتَ لَتَخَذِّلَ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَأْوِيلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبَرًا

So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so he restored it. [Mūsā] said, "If you wished, you could have taken for it a payment." [Khidhr] said, "This is parting between me and you. I will inform you of the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience."

They then traveled on until they arrived at a town whose people were most unfriendly. They neither welcomed guests nor assisted those who were poor and hungry. Khidhr and Mūsā requested something to eat after their long journey but the people refused, not showing even the most basic hospitality.

In that same town there was a wall which was on the point of collapsing. Khidhr repaired it with his own hands although the people offered him no reimbursement for his service. Mūsā deemed this a great injustice and could not refrain from commenting once again, in further violation of his agreement. This indicated that it was time for them to part company, for Allāh had willed that Mūsā should make this final stipulation.

Thereupon, Khidhr declared that the limit had been reached and that they

¹³⁵Expressed in Arabic by the addition of *laka*, i.e., "Did I not say *to you*...?"

would part as Mūsā had consented. Nonetheless, Khidhr agreed to explain to him his actions in order to correct the misunderstanding.

Khidhr's deeds had appeared to Mūsā to have no logical justification. They could not have been understood without access to the wisdom dictating them. His explanation contains a warning that external appearance and internal reality may be quite different from one another, and that those who make judgments without comprehension of the realities will inevitably be mistaken in their conclusions.

... Āyah 79 ...

أَمَّا الْسَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسْكِينٍ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيهَا وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ

سَفِينَةٍ غَصِبًا

"As for the ship, it belonged to poor people working at sea. So I intended to cause defect in it as there was after them a king who seized every [good] ship by force."

Oppressive regimes have plagued mankind since the beginning of human history. At this particular time, a despotic king had been confiscating the properties of defenseless people, leaving them in hardship and destitution.¹³⁶ The ship's crew were hardworking men who just managed to earn enough for their daily provisions. Khidhr wanted to prevent further difficulty for them, so he tore a plank from the boat to make it appear unsound and of no value to the king's agents. By damaging the ship, Khidhr was benefiting the needy boatmen, since the king's men would not seize a defective one and they could fix it later on after the inspection was over.

The foresight and wisdom of Khidhr are evident in the way he damaged the ship so that it could easily be repaired and returned to service. The slight damage the boat suffered was sufficient to save it from greater harm and the cruel injustice which was certain to take place without it. Had it been seaworthy, the vessel would certainly have been confiscated by the tyrannical king, so causing the damage was in fact a kind and compassionate act.

... Āyahs 80-81 ...

وَأَمَّا الْغُلَمُ فَكَانَ أَبُوهُ مُؤْمِنٍ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهِقُهُمَا طُغِيَّنَا وَكُفَّرَا

رَهُمَا حَيْرًا مِّنْهُ زَكَةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا

¹³⁶As in monarchical and feudal regimes of the past, it is still common in the authoritarian regimes of today who seize property without justification, leaving people in anguish and financial adversity.

"And as for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared that he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief. So we intended that their Lord should substitute for them one better than him in purity and nearer to mercy."

Although his parents were believers, Khidhr knew of the young boy's potential for evil and corruption which was bound to become manifest as he grew older. Allāh had given him certain knowledge that this boy was destined to become an unbeliever and would bring bitter grief to his parents. He was obligated to take action in order to prevent the atrocities their son would have committed, causing them constant pain and torment. Some commentators have offered an alternative explanation: that had the boy lived, he might have led his parents, out of love for him, to condone or even follow his ways of unbelief and wickedness. Thus, he would have been the cause of their torment in the Hellfire.

Ibn Katheer quoted Qatādah as saying, "His parents rejoiced when he was born, and they grieved for him when he was killed. But if he had remained alive, he would have been the cause of their destruction. So let a person be content with the decree of Allāh because for the believer, the decree of Allāh which he dislikes is better for him than the decree which he likes." This is confirmed by Allāh's words:

وَعَسَىٰ أَن تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ ۚ وَعَسَىٰ أَن تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

"And perhaps you dislike a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allāh knows, while you know not."¹³⁷

Allāh directed His righteous servant to take the life of the boy.¹³⁸ He had informed Khidhr that He would replace that son with another whose soul would be pure and more merciful, one for whom the parents would feel greater compassion.

... Āyah 82 ...

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَمَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ رَكْزٌ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَلِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَن يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَرْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَمَا فَعَلْتُهُ عَنْ أَمْرِي ۝ ذَلِكَ تَأْوِيلٌ مَا لَمْ
تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبَرًا

¹³⁷ *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:216.

¹³⁸ Allāh did not will to eliminate the boy by any other means, such as an accident or illness. It was decreed to be done at the hand of Khidhr and witnessed by Prophet Mūsā.

"And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous. So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience."

The wall that was repaired by Khidhr belonged to two orphan boys living in the town, and beneath it some wealth had been buried by their father¹³⁹ in order to protect it for them until they reached maturity. Because he knew the father had been a righteous man, Khidhr perceived that the wall should be repaired in order to preserve that wealth for their future. Had he not done so, the wall would have collapsed and exposed the treasure, and the young orphans would have lost it to the uncaring and greedy population.

Thus, Allāh allowed the righteous man's children to benefit from his piety while they remained in a state of weakness. Their Lord willed to give the orphans time to grow up and recover their wealth once they had the ability to protect it and use it wisely.¹⁴⁰ By the time the wall was likely to fall once again, it would be years later when the two boys were adults and could manage their own affairs. In the meantime, they would continue to live in meager circumstances until they matured and gained wisdom.

Ibn ‘Abbās commented, "They were taken care of due to the righteousness of their father, although it is not stated that they themselves were righteous." And Ibn Katheer added, "This indicates that a righteous person's offspring will be taken care of and that the blessing of his worship will extend to them in this world as well as in the Hereafter, [which will be] through his intercession for them, raising their position to the highest levels of Paradise so that he may find joy in them. This has been stated in the Qur'ān and related in the Sunnah."

Khidhr had now shown Mūsā the meaning of those deeds which he had not understood previously. His nature is revealed in these few verses. Allāh granted him strength, wisdom, superior knowledge, unique perception and upright character, making him an excellent example and outstanding teacher. He educated Mūsā and taught him to seek the purpose and wisdom behind every experience.

Khidhr affirmed that his actions were in no way the result of his own judgement. It was Allāh, the Almighty, who had commanded him and imparted to him the necessary knowledge in each case; thus he concluded, "**I did it not of my own accord.**" The three incidents witnessed by Prophet Mūsā in support of the crew of the ship, the parents of the boy, and the two sons of the righteous

¹³⁹Ibn Katheer quotes a statement that the father was a forefather seven generations back, but only Allāh knows the true fact.

¹⁴⁰Reparation of the wall indicates the obligation to protect the properties of children and weaker members of society. Had the wall been left to collapse, the orphans' wealth would have been lost.

man were manifestations of Allāh's mercy, accomplished through His servant, Khidhr, by divine will and decree.

The story of Mūsā and Khidhr is also related in a *ḥadīth* from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:¹⁴¹

Ubayy bin Ka'b reported that Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Mūsā, the prophet, once stood addressing Banī Isrā'eel. He was asked, 'Who is most knowledgeable among the people?' So he replied, 'I am most knowledgeable.' Allāh reproached him, as he did not attribute [the source of] knowledge to Him. Then He revealed to him: 'There is servant of Mine at the junction of the two seas who is more knowledgeable than you.' Mūsā said, 'O my Lord, how can I find him?' He was told, 'Carry a fish in a large basket, and when you lose it, he will be there.'

Mūsā set out accompanied by his servant boy, Yūsha' bin Nūn, and they carried a fish in a basket. [They proceeded] until, when they arrived at a large rock, they laid their heads down and slept. The fish slipped out of the basket and made its way into the sea; for Mūsā and his servant boy it was something amazing. They traveled the rest of the night into the day, and when it was morning, Mūsā said to his servant boy: 'Bring us our morning meal. We have certainly suffered in this journey of ours much fatigue.' Mūsā did not feel any fatigue until he had gone beyond the place which had been indicated to him. The boy said to him, 'Did you see when we retired to the rock? Indeed, I forgot the fish [there].' Mūsā said: 'That was what we were seeking.' So they returned, retracing their footsteps.

When they reached the rock, they found a man wrapped in a garment. Mūsā greeted him with peace and Khidhr said, 'So is it how the greeting is in your land?' Mūsā said, 'I am Mūsā.' He said, 'The Mūsā of Banī Isrā'eel?' Mūsā said, 'Yes. May I follow you so that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?' He replied, 'You will never be able to have patience with me. O Mūsā, I have some of the knowledge from Allāh which He has taught me and you do not know, while you have some of the knowledge from Allāh which He has taught you and I do not know.' Mūsā said, 'You will find me, in shā Allāh, patient, and I will not disobey you in any order.'

So they set out, walking along the seashore as they had no ship. Then a ship passed near them, so they asked to be taken aboard. Khidhr was known, so [the crew] took them on board without a fare. A bird came and alighted on the edge of the ship and dipped its beak once or twice into the sea. Khidhr said, 'O Mūsā, my knowledge and your knowledge do not diminish the knowledge of

¹⁴¹Sa'eed bin Jubayr reported, "I said to Ibn 'Abbās, 'Nawf al-Bakālī claims that Mūsā, the companion of al-Khidhr, was not the same Mūsā of the Children of Israel but another by the name of Mūsā.' Ibn 'Abbās said, 'The enemy of Allāh has lied.'" Then he related this *ḥadīth* as proof.

Allāh any more than what this bird has taken on its beak from the sea.' Then Khidhr went to one of the ships planks and pulled it out. Mūsā said, 'A people took us on board without fare and you purposely tore a hole in their ship so its passengers will drown?!!' Khidhr replied, 'Did I not say that you would not be able to have patience with me?' Mūsā said, 'Do not blame me for what I forgot and do not overwhelm me in my matter with difficulty.' So the first [excuse] from Mūsā was forgetfulness.

Then they set out [once again]. They soon came upon a boy playing with other boys. Khidhr took hold of the boy's head from the top and pulled it out [from his body] with his hand. Mūsā said, 'Have you killed a pure soul for other than [having killed] a soul?! You have certainly done a deplorable thing.' [Khidhr] said, 'Did I not tell you that you would never be able to have patience with me?'

Then they set out until, when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. They found within it a wall about to collapse, and Khidhr repaired it with his hands. Mūsā said, 'If you wished, you could have taken for it a wage.' [Khidhr] said, 'This is parting between you and me.'" The Prophet (ﷺ) then added: "May Allāh have mercy on Mūsā. We wish he had been patient so that more about them would have been related to us."

This *hadīth* was placed by Imām al-Bukhārī in a chapter of his collection called *The Book of Knowledge*. Ibn Ḥajar commented that his purpose was to encourage the pursuit of knowledge even if it should involve hardship. The example of Prophet Mūsā (عليه السلام), who did not hesitate to travel and humble himself in order to learn, is one of strong determination.

Four points may be ascertained from this story: that knowledge is valuable, that human knowledge is nothing compared to the knowledge of Allāh, that one may find something objectionable not knowing the benefit behind it, and that patience, determination and humbleness are needed to succeed in life. The three incidents in this narration have been said to correspond to three great trials faced by human beings in life: injustice, death and financial issues. And all of them require patience and strength of character.

... Āyahs 83-85 ...

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ ذِي الْقَرْبَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُم مِّنْهُ ذِكْرًا إِنَّا مَكَنَّا لَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَتَيْنَاهُ
مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ سَبَبًا فَاتَّبَعَ سَبَبًا

And they ask you about Dhul-Qarnayn. Say, "I will recite to you about him an account." Indeed, We established him upon the earth, and We gave him from everything a way [i.e., means]. So he followed a way.

In answer to the second question posed by the polytheists as instructed by the Jews, the Qur’ān relates the story of the powerful Dhul-Qarnayn.¹⁴² Its text does not mention when he lived or from what land he originated. This is a characteristic of most Qur’ānic narratives, whose purpose is not to provide historical facts but to convey the lessons that can be drawn from them. What this *sūrah* contains in reference to Dhul-Qarnayn was revealed by Allāh to His Messenger (ﷺ). There is no other authentic source which adds further information.¹⁴³

Although his identity is not revealed,¹⁴⁴ the Qur’ān illustrates that Dhul-Qarnayn was a righteous believer and that his great political and military power was established on foundations of faith. Therefore, Allāh provided him with the means by which to conquer much of the earth and rule with justice, granting him uncontested authority in his time. He was given the facilities to develop civilization and benefit from the blessings Allāh makes available to mankind – those which can make earthly life stable and prosperous.

Dhul-Qarnayn was an intelligent, discerning and perceptive believer. He chose the correct ways and means to achieve his worthy objectives, and his nation was upright and strong. He had all that a ruler could wish for of armies, equipment, tools and machinery, as well as the support of peoples well satisfied with his rule of justice. He held dominance over the east and the west; all populations and their leaders accepted and served him. The Mighty and Majestic Lord had provided the means for all this – the resources and strategies necessary to defeat opponents, conquer vast regions of the earth, and humiliate enemies of Allāh. "**He followed a way**" has been explained as: "He followed the routes and landmarks of the earth as a means to achieve his aims" and "He followed the methods and means" of success.

... Āyahs 86-88 ...

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَغْرِبَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَغُرُّبُ فِي عَيْنٍ حَمِئَةٍ وَوَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا قَوْمًا قُلْنَا يَدَا الْقَرَبَيْنِ إِمَّا أَنْ تُعَذِّبَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَتَخَذَ فِيهِمْ حُسْنَانًا ﴿٨٦﴾ قَالَ أَمَّا مَنْ ظَلَمَ فَسَوْفَ نُعَذِّبُهُ ثُمَّ يُرَدُُ إِلَى

¹⁴²Sayyid Quṭb remarks that perhaps the divine purpose was to make the prophethood of Muḥammad (ﷺ) even more evident, as if to say, "See how precisely he relates these untraceable events of the distant past; for it is Allāh, the All-Knowing, who informs him."

¹⁴³Once again it can be noted that commentaries on the Qur’ān often add various unconfirmed details to its stories; thus, they should be approached cautiously. History is a product of humanity and is not free of imperfection, error and misrepresentation. Referring to historical writings in order to explain accounts given in the Qur’ān is unreliable. Because Allāh guaranteed its preservation and protection against distortion, the Qur’ān itself is the final authority and the only accurate reference for historical accounts.

¹⁴⁴It is certain that he was not Alexander the Great, a Greek pagan who worshipped idols, because the Qur’ān speaks of him as one who believed in Allāh, the Resurrection and the Judgement.

رَبِّهِ فَيُعَذِّبُهُ وَعَذَابًا نُّكَرًا ﴿٨٧﴾ وَأَمَّا مَنْ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُ جَزَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ وَسَنَقُولُ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِنَا يُسْرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

Until, when he reached the setting of the sun [i.e., the west], he found it [as if] setting in a body of dark water,¹⁴⁵ and he found near it a people. We [i.e., Allāh] said, "O Dhul-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness." He said, "As for one who wrongs,¹⁴⁶ we will punish him; then he will be returned to his Lord, and He will punish him with a terrible punishment. But as for one who believes and does righteousness, he will have a reward of the best, and we [i.e., Dhul-Qarnayn] will speak to him from our command with ease."

Dhul-Qarnayn followed the directives of his Lord and employed the appropriate means wherever he went. He traveled to the westernmost land, where he found some inhabitants. "**The setting of the sun**" refers to the western horizon behind which the sun seems to descend. From the shore it appears as if it sets in the sea, so some commentators interpreted 'ayn hami'ah (dark or murky water) as the Atlantic Ocean as it appears from the west coast of Africa. Others maintained that it could be another body of water in reference to Asia, such as the Black Sea or the Mediterranean, but Allāh knows best.

Dhul-Qarnayn was given authority to either punish the people of conquered lands or treat them benevolently. He declared a just policy in all the areas whose populations came under his authority. His faith and moral character are apparent in the pronouncement that those who transgressed would not only be subject to punishment in this life, but unless they repented and became righteous, they would find the punishment of their Lord in the Hereafter far greater. Conversely, righteous believers would not only have the best reward in the next life but would also be treated well by his administration. Thus, he endeavored to make his command in line with the divine pattern of justice, and this is the framework of true Islamic government.

... Āyahs 89-91 ...

ثُمَّ أَتَيَّ بَعَدَ سَبَبًا ﴿٨٩﴾ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَطْلَعَ الْشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَطْلُعُ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ لَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهَا سِرَّا
كَذَّلِكَ وَقَدْ أَحَاطْنَا بِمَا لَدَيْهِ خُبْرًا ﴿٩٠﴾

Then he followed a way until, when he came to the rising of the sun [i.e., the east], he found it rising on a people for whom We had not made against it any shield. Thus.¹⁴⁷ And We had encompassed [all] that he had in knowledge.

¹⁴⁵ Another meaning may be "a spring of hot water."

¹⁴⁶ Persists in disbelief and rebellion.

¹⁴⁷ Such was the affair of Dhul-Qarnayn.

He then marched eastward, again choosing the best means to achieve his objectives. In the words of Ibn Katheer: "Allāh is saying that Dhul-Qarnayn then took another route and traveled from the west to the east. Whenever he came to a nation, he overpowered them, subdued them and invited them to Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic. If they obeyed him, [it was good]; otherwise, he would humble them and confiscate their wealth and possessions. From each nation he utilized that which would enable his armies to fight the next one."

When he arrived at the eastern land beyond which the sun was seen to rise, he found a primitive people who had no protection against its heat, neither shelter nor shade. No particular location is specified, but the land was obviously undeveloped, conceivably a desert without valleys or trees and where people lived in the open, directly exposed to the sun. They had neither buildings nor adequate clothing with which to cover themselves. Qatādah said, "It was mentioned to us that they were in a land where nothing grew, so when the sun rose, they would go into underground burrows until it had passed its zenith; then they would come out to go about their activities and make their living." Ibn Jareer at-Tabarī added, "When the sun came up, they would go into their tunnels or into the sea."

Allāh confirms His narrative with one word: *kadhālik*, meaning "thus" or "that is how it was." As Dhul-Qarnayn had already announced his policy of government, it is not repeated in this encounter, and no further action is mentioned. It is understood that Dhul-Qarnayn left those people in peace out of mercy, that Allāh's knowledge encompassed everything concerning the situation, and that He appreciated the decision of Dhul-Qarnayn.

Mujāhid commented, "Allāh stated that He was acquainted with everything about him and his army even though those nations were various and their lands were independent of one another. For nothing is hidden from Allāh on the earth, nor in the heaven."

... Āyahs 92-94 ...

ثُمَّ أَتَبَعَ سَبَبًا ﴿٩٢﴾ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيْنَ السَّدَيْنِ وَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمَا قَوْمًا لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ قَوْلًا ﴿٩٣﴾
قَالُوا يَيْدَا الْقَرْنَيْنِ إِنَّ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَاجُوجَ مُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَهَلْ نَجْعَلُ لَكَ خَرْجًا عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ
بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًا ﴿٩٤﴾

Then he followed a way until, when he reached [a pass] between two mountains, he found beside them a people who could hardly understand [his] speech. They said, "O Dhul-Qarnayn, indeed Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are [great] corrupters in the land. So may we assign for you an expenditure that you might make between us and them a barrier?"

Dhul-Qarnayn set out once again until he reached a pass between two mountain barriers. There he encountered a people who could hardly understand what he said, perhaps indicating that they spoke a different language or one that was unusual. Nevertheless, he or some members of his party apparently had knowledge of that language, as he was able to communicate with them.

The people conveyed to him that the tribes of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj (Gog and Magog), who lived beyond the valley, would periodically enter and spread corruption in their land. The scholars mention that these savages had ravaged large parts of central Asia, committing every kind of atrocity, and were threatening their populations as well. From time to time they would attack from beyond the mountain barriers without provocation, destroying everything in their path. The people of that region had suffered oppression and abuse at their hands and were incapable of adequate defense. They realized that as well as being powerful and capable, Dhul-Qarnayn was ethical and upheld justice. Hence, they offered him payment in return for his assistance in erecting a barrier to prevent Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj from entry.

These ferocious tribes are mentioned twice in the Qur'ān: in this verse of *Sūrah al-Kahf* and also in *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, where the approach of the Last Day is described:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُتَحَتْ يَأْجُوجُ وَمَاجُوجُ وَهُم مِّن كُلِّ حَدَبٍ يَنْسِلُونَ

"Ultimately, when [the barrier of] Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj has been opened and they, from every elevation, will descend..."¹⁴⁸

And they have been mentioned in narrations by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others as being among the descendants of Ādam from whom will be most of the inhabitants of the Hellfire. When Allāh addressed him, saying, "O Adam, bring forth the company of the Fire," he asked, "What is the company of the Fire?" Allāh said, "From every thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine will be sent to the Fire and one to Paradise." One *hadīth* continues, "At that time the child will become gray-haired, and every pregnant female will drop her load; and you will see people as intoxicated, while they are not intoxicated, but indeed the punishment of Allāh is severe." The *ṣahābah* found this extremely distressing, so the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Accept good tidings. Nine hundred and ninety-nine will be of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj, and the one will be of you. Indeed, there are two peoples who are not in a place but that they outnumber [those within] it: Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj."

Dhul-Qarnayn was known as a just leader who prevented corruption and wickedness, so communities afflicted by internal difficulties or external pressures would seek his assistance. This is an indication of the size and power of his nation. The inhabitants of the region had exhausted all means available to them,

¹⁴⁸ *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:96. In a lengthy *hadīth* narrated by Muslim, it says, "And Allāh will send Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj, and they will come from every lofty place."

yet they were unable to repel the evil intruders. Hence they were prepared to pay whatever they could collect for a solution to their problem, utilizing the strength of Dhul-Qarnayn's forces. Possibly, he had teams of engineers and construction experts, or he himself might have been known for expertise in those fields.

... Āyahs 95-97 ...

قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِي فِيهِ رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَأَعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا ﴿٩٥﴾ إِذَا سَأَوَى بَيْنَ الْصَّدَافَيْنِ قَالَ أَنْفُخُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ إِذَا أَتُونِي أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْهِ قِطْرًا ﴿٩٦﴾ فَمَا أَسْطَعُوا أَنْ يَظْهَرُوهُ وَمَا أَسْتَطَعُوا لَهُ نَقْبًا ﴿٩٧﴾

He said, "That in which my Lord has established me is better [than what you offer], but assist me with strength [i.e., manpower]; I will make between you and them a dam. Bring me bars of iron" – until, when he had leveled [them] between the two mountain walls, he said, "Blow [with bellows]," until when he had made it [like] fire, he said, "Bring me, that I may pour over it molten copper." So they [i.e., Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj] were unable to pass over it, nor were they able [to effect] in it any penetration.

Dhul-Qarnayn was aware of his obligation to protect and achieve security for the regions under his administration. Following his declared policy of opposing evil and corruption, he responded to the people's request and declined to accept payment, asking nothing of them except assistance in terms of manpower. Providing employment and a measure of responsibility to the local population undoubtedly served to strengthen their allegiance to the commander as well as fostering a relationship of mutual support, trust and respect. It enabled those employed to learn useful aspects of technology and provided them with a role in their own defense.

Dhul-Qarnayn perceived that the best way to prevent the intrusion of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj was to fill in and seal the passageway between the two mountain ranges. This barrier needed to be made of the strongest materials, so the people were told to bring bars of iron.¹⁴⁹ From the floor of the valley he had the iron pieces arranged as a broad structure completely filling its width; then they were stacked and fitted together until they reached the level of the mountain peaks. Once the wall was in place, its gaps were sealed by pouring red-hot, molten copper over the iron, welding the blocks together and preventing oxidation.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹Iron has always been an essential component of bridges and dams, increasing the structure's strength and rigidity.

¹⁵⁰Sayyid Quṭb mentions that this method has recently been used in strengthening iron, reinforcing it by adding a measure of copper. It is to this that Allāh guided Dhul-Qarnayn, recording the fact in His Book many centuries before it was discovered by human science. The Arabic word *qitr*, meaning "molten copper" can also be translated as "tar." Dhul-Qarnayn may have poured tar over the structure as well, in order to prevent rusting.

The completed barrier was structurally sound, an unprecedented example of solid architecture and superior technology.

Thus, the passage through which Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj launched their attacks was completely sealed. No force applied to such a structure could destroy or damage it, and the savage tribes were unable to scale or penetrate the barrier.¹⁵¹ Dhul-Qarnayn had made the world safe from them for as long as Allāh should will, as stated in the following āyah.

... Āyah 98 ...

قَالَ هَذَا رَحْمَةٌ مِّنْ رَّبِّيٍّ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ رَّبِّيٍّ جَاءَ دَكَّاءٌ وَّكَانَ وَعْدُ رَّبِّيٍّ حَقًّا

[Dhul-Qarnayn] said, "This is a mercy from my Lord; but when the promise of my Lord approaches, He will make it level, and ever is the promise of my Lord true."

The first thing announced by Dhul-Qarnayn after completing his project is that it was a manifestation of Allāh's mercy and that it was his Lord who enabled him to carry it out. By publicly acknowledging and attributing his success to Allāh, he set an example for the people, letting them know that nothing can be accomplished unless He wills it. But Dhul-Qarnayn also warned that one day his Lord had promised to reduce that barrier to ruin, at which time Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj would be released into the world.

Two interpretations have been given by scholars concerning the time of that promise. One is that destruction of the barrier may already have occurred when the Tatars swept across Asia, destroying its civilizations and ultimately, the Abbāsid Caliphate. The other is that it refers to what will happen near the end of the world, related in the past tense as if it had already taken place. This is similar in wording to descriptions in the Qur'ān of the Hereafter. Accordingly, the emergence of these fierce tribes has been cited as one of the major signs preceding the final Hour. As described in more than one sound *ḥadīth*, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj have been relentlessly attempting to penetrate the barrier and will continue to do so until Allāh decrees their success.

Zaynab bint Jaḥsh reported that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) went out one day in a state of alarm with his face red, saying, "*Lā ilāha ill-Allāh! Woe to the Arabs from an evil which has approached! Today an opening was made in the barrier of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj like this,*" and he formed a ring with his thumb and index finger. She said, "O Messenger of Allāh, will we be destroyed even though there are righteous people among us?" He replied, "Yes, when wickedness increases."¹⁵²

¹⁵¹Its location is presently unknown. But given that Allāh has mentioned it and that His Messenger (ﷺ) described this wall, it is incumbent upon Muslims to believe that it exists, as it is in the case of all matters stated in the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah.

¹⁵²Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

With this verse ends the story of Dhul-Qarnayn, a remarkable yet inspiring example of a virtuous ruler who was granted power and vast resources. Although he led his forces over the land to distant regions of the earth, he never oppressed a people or acted arrogantly toward them. Nor did he consider his conquest a means to exploit them and secure thereby a level of affluence for himself and his associates. Rather, he upheld justice, assisted the weak and charged them nothing for his services. He utilized the authority granted him by Allāh for building secure communities where everyone might obtain his due. And he credited the results of his good work to the grace of his Lord and Creator, claiming none of it for himself.

... Āyahs 99-101 ...

وَتَرَكْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَمُوجُ فِي بَعْضٍ وَنُفِخَ فِي الْصُّورِ بِمَعْنَاهُمْ جَمِيعًا ﴿٩٩﴾ وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْكَفِرِينَ عَرْضًا ﴿١٠٠﴾ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا لَا يَسْتَطِعُونَ سَعْيًا

And We will leave them that day surging over each other, and [then] the Horn will be blown, and We will assemble them in [one] assembly. And We will present Hell that Day to the disbelievers, on display – those whose eyes had been within a cover [removed] from My remembrance while they were not able to hear.¹⁵³

On the day the barrier is destroyed, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj will emerge, overwhelming the rest of mankind, surging among the people like waves, rising and dashing against them, causing civil strife, wars and genocides, destroying lives, wealth and property. The words portray a movement of masses of people of all colors, races and nations. Allāh will allow this to occur shortly before the onset of the Final Hour.

His Messenger (ﷺ) said, "They will dig their way out and emerge to attack the people. They will [drink and] dry up the water, and the people will seek protection from them in their fortresses. They will shoot their arrows into the sky, and they will come down with something like blood on them, so they will say, 'We have defeated the people of the earth and overcome the people of heaven.' Then Allāh will send small creatures upon their necks which will kill them. By Him in whose hand is my soul, the beasts of the earth will grow fat from their flesh and blood."¹⁵⁴

This event is followed by the blowing of the Horn that signals the Hour of Resurrection. The angel Isrāfeel will blow into it, as the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "How can I find pleasure when the one with the Horn has put the Horn to his mouth and lowered his head, listening for the command to blow."

¹⁵³i.e., they refused to listen to the truth.

¹⁵⁴Ibn Mājah – ṣaḥīḥ.

His companions fearfully asked, "What should we say?" He replied, "Say, 'Hasbuna-Allāhu wa ni'm al-wakeel; 'ala-Allāhi tawakalnā.'" ("Allāh is sufficient for us and the best disposer of affairs; we have relied upon Allāh.")¹⁵⁵

Then all creatures will be gathered for the Judgement and will be shown the Hellfire, as mentioned in the Qur'ān:

وَإِن مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارْدُهَا كَانَ عَلَى رَبِّكَ حَتَّىٰ مَقْضِيًّا

"And there is none of you except he will come to it. This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed."¹⁵⁶

Everyone must view this terrifying scene so that those who are saved from it will be filled with gratitude and those who will enter it will be filled with dread and additional regret. Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) disclosed, "*The Hellfire will be brought, being led from seventy thousand halters – at each one, seventy thousand angels pulling it.*"¹⁵⁷

It will be shown at especially close range to those who had denied faith and refused to see or hear the truth. The inhabitants of Hell will observe their destined abode directly before them and will perceive its torment before entering it, thereby intensifying their sorrow and distress. But they will also realize that this is their just compensation for deliberately rejecting the truth and preferring to follow their own sinful desires.

… Āyah 102 …

أَفَحِسِبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ يَتَخَذِّلُوا عِبَادِي مِنْ دُونِي أَوْلِيَاءٍ إِنَّا أَعْتَدَنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نُزِّلَ

Then do those who disbelieve think that they can take My servants instead of Me as allies? Indeed, We have prepared Hell for the disbelievers as a lodging.

Allāh strongly rebukes those who think they can be benefited by creations like themselves rather than their Creator. They turn to others as helpers and protectors, forgetting that no person, means or treatment can assist them unless Allāh has decreed it. People call upon these false deities when in need and are grateful to them if Allāh has enabled them to benefit. But in reality, everything that exists is within His grasp, and thus, every other being is helpless and dependent, lacking the power and means to help even its own self unless Allāh should will. As He said in His Book:

وَآتَخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا لَعَلَّهُمْ يُنَصَّرُونَ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُمْ

¹⁵⁵ At-Tirmidhī – *hasan*.

¹⁵⁶ *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:71.

¹⁵⁷ Muslim.

"And they have taken for themselves gods other than Allāh that perhaps they would be helped. They are not able to help them, and [moreover], they are soldiers in attendance for them."¹⁵⁸

Belief in and dependence on worldly powers rather than the power of Allāh is a manifestation of major *shirk*. Placing one's trust and hope in them will only result in disappointment in this life and devastation in the Hereafter. Allāh said:

أَمْ هُمْ بِاللَّهِ تَمْنَعُهُمْ مِنْ دُونِنَا لَا يَسْتَطِعُونَ نَصْرًا أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ مِنَ
يُصْحِبُونَ

"Or have they gods that defend them other than Us? They are not able to help [even] themselves, nor can they be protected from Us."¹⁵⁹

Do those unbelievers think that any creation will be able to give them help or grant them protection against the anger of Allāh?

كَلَّا سَيَكْفُرُونَ بِعِبَادَتِهِمْ وَيَكُونُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضِدًّا

"No! They will deny their worship of them and will be opponents against them."¹⁶⁰

The ones they had so eagerly obeyed and worshipped in the world will be brought forward on the Day of Judgement as adversaries against them, disparaging their worshippers and disassociating themselves from them.

Hence, if one thinks he can be helped by lords other than Allāh, his trust will betray him and he will experience the result of his self-delusion – eternal suffering in the fire of Hell. There will be no escape from this final abode, nor can he avoid it as he used to avoid Allāh's guidance.

... Āyahs 103-106 ...

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَيِّكُمْ بِالْأَحْسَرِينَ أَعْمَلَاهُمْ ۝ الَّذِينَ صَلَّى سَعْيَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ تَحْسِبُونَ أَهْمَمُهُمْ
تَحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ۝ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِإِيمَانِهِمْ وَلِقَاءِهِ فَخَبِطَتْ أَعْمَلُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَمَةِ وَزَنًا ۝ ذَلِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَاتَّخَذُوا إِيمَانِي وَرُسُلِي هُرُونًا

¹⁵⁸i.e., the "gods" created by men must themselves be maintained and protected; otherwise they could not exist. The Qur'ānic reference is *Sūrah Yā Seen*, 36:74-75.

¹⁵⁹*Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:43.

¹⁶⁰*Sūrah Maryam*, 19:82.

Say, [O Muḥammad], "Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work." Those are the ones who disbelieve in the verses of their Lord and in [their] meeting Him, so their deeds have become worthless; and We will not assign to them on the Day of Resurrection any weight [i.e., importance]. That is their recompense – Hell – for what they denied and [because] they took My signs and My messengers in ridicule.

These short verses sum up the theme of the *sūrah*. The values and standards of materialistic societies are vastly different from those of Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, and excessive pursuit of worldly benefits only diverts people from His guidance.

In *Āyah* 103, the Prophet (ﷺ) is instructed to pose the question of who will ultimately be the greatest failures and lose most in the Hereafter. *Āyah* 104 then provides the answer: They are the misguided people whose efforts are wasted during worldly life although they mistakenly believe they are doing well and that their works and achievements are of great value. Ibn Katheer commented, "The *āyah* does not concern any group in particular; it was revealed in Makkah before the Qur'ān addressed the Jews and Christians and before the Khawārij and other deviant sects existed. So it is general, referring to everyone who worships Allāh in a way that is not acceptable, thinking he is correct in doing so and that his deeds will be accepted. But he is mistaken, and his deeds will be rejected."

Āyah 105 further describes the greatest losers: they are people who refuse belief in their Lord's revelations and deny that they will ever meet Him. Since they reject their Lord's guidance, He will look upon their lifetime of exertion as worthless. And because they do not seek His acceptance, their ostensibly great accomplishments will have no value at all before Allāh. Use of the Arabic word *habitat* imparts the image of the grazing animal which has fed on poisonous plants causing its belly to bloat before its death. At first glance one might assume it to be healthy and well-fed; such is the illusory appearance of the unbelievers' deeds. They were done only for the world and remain confined to the world, while the world itself is an insignificant aspect of creation. In the words of Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ), "*If the world was worth any more to Allāh than the wing of a mosquito, He would not have given an unbeliever a sip of water from it.*"¹⁶¹

In similar verses Allāh said:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَلُهُمْ كَسَرَابٌ بِقِيَعَةٍ تَحْسِبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ رَمَ تَحْكَدُهُ
شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ

¹⁶¹ At-Tirmidhī – *sahīeh*.

"And those who disbelieved – their deeds are like a mirage in lowlands which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allāh before him..."¹⁶²

وَقَدِمَنَا إِلَىٰ مَا عَمِلُوا مِنْ عَمَلٍ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ هَبَاءً مَّنْشُورًا

"And We will approach what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed."¹⁶³

These verses speak of people who worked hard during their worldly lives, achieved fame, financial success and made significant material contributions to their societies. They believed that what they were doing was good, unaware that deeds alone without faith will not save one from ruin, for their significance ends with the end of the world. Abū Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said: "A massive fat man will come on the Day of Resurrection not weighing in the estimation of Allāh as much as the wing of a mosquito. Recite if you wish: 'And We will not assign to them, on the Day of Resurrection, any weight.'"¹⁶⁴ These words were explained by Ibn Katheer as meaning: "We will not make their scales heavy because they contain no good."

There is no escape from the reality of the Hereafter. Regardless of their renowned achievements and celebrated worldly successes, unbelievers will find that the fire of Hell is their only just compensation for having rejected the truth and disparaged Allāh's signs and His messengers. Mockery is the tactic of conceited, ignorant people who attempt to conceal their own weaknesses and failures, for they have no valid evidence with which to support their empty arguments against truth.

... Āyahs 107-108 ...

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَنَّتُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلاً ﴿١٧﴾ حَلِيلِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ
عَنْهَا حِوَّلًا ﴿١٨﴾

Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds – they will have the Gardens of Paradise as a lodging, wherein they abide eternally. They will not desire from it any transfer.

Those whose faith leads them to do the righteous deeds ordained by Allāh will have the Gardens of Paradise as their permanent accommodation. Their trial is now over and the believers experience great joy, for not only have they been saved from the torments of Hell but they have been granted indescribable blessings by their Lord. And the greatest of those blessings is His approval of them and His appearance before their very eyes in Paradise. *Al-Firdaus* is the

¹⁶² *Sūrah an-Nūr*, 24:39.

¹⁶³ *Sūrah al-Furqān*, 25:23.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

most central, highest and best part of Paradise. The Messenger (ﷺ) said, "If you ask Allāh, ask Him for al-Firdaus, for it is the center of Paradise, the highest part of Paradise, above it is the Throne of the Most Merciful, and from it spring the rivers of Paradise."¹⁶⁵

Human beings by nature become bored and dissatisfied with any state that continues unchanged during worldly life. But the Creator will amend that nature in the Hereafter so that the inhabitants of Paradise will be completely content and pleased with their perfect state. They will love their blissful abode and never want to leave it or alter anything therein, for there is nothing better in all creation than the Gardens of *al-Firdaus*.

... Āyah 109 ...

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَنْفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا



Say, "If the sea were ink for [writing] the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like of it in [continuous] supplement."

The Prophet (ﷺ) is told to declare to the people that if the entire ocean were ink in a pen recording the words of his Lord, it would be used up before the writing of his Lord's words was finished, even if similar oceans were added to it repeatedly. The Qur'ān puts forward an image of the sea with all its vast expanse as if it were ink with which to write down the innumerable and inexhaustible words of Allāh.

Scholars have explained Allāh's words as being: His unlimited knowledge, His wisdom, His signs and His evidences, or words describing His grandeur and other attributes, or praise of Him. Ibn Katheer said: "No one can estimate the magnitude of Allāh or praise Him as He deserves to be praised except Allāh when He praises Himself. Our Lord is as He says He is and greater than what we can say. And the blessings of this world from its beginning to end in comparison to the blessings of the Hereafter are like a mustard seed compared to the capacity of the whole world."

Allāh, the Exalted, perceives and controls everything that happens on the earth and throughout the universe, every point in space, every particle within every atom, and every thought that occurs to every human being. He knows intimately each person who has ever lived, the genetic codes of the billions of people, animals and plants that ever existed and will yet exist, the state of each among the billions of stars within billions of galaxies – all the things about which man himself could never finish writing or speaking. Allāh's knowledge

¹⁶⁵ Al-Bukhārī.

and ability has no boundaries. Although the entire sea should be used for recording them and would run out, His words continue. When another sea of similar volume is brought, it too is finished; yet Allāh's words continue. The Qur'ān suggests a continual replenishment, conveying the concept of infinity. In a similar *āyah*, Allāh has said:

وَلَوْ أَنَّمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَمُ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمْدُدُهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةُ أَخْرُ مَا نَفِدْتُ
كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

"And if whatever trees upon the earth were pens and the sea [was ink], replenished thereafter by seven [more] seas, the words of Allāh would not be exhausted. Indeed, Allāh is Exalted in Might and Wise."¹⁶⁶

Sayyid Qutb wrote, "In this example the sea represents human knowledge which people imagine to be great. But vast and rich as the seas and oceans might be, they remain limited. Allāh's words, on the other hand, represent His infinite knowledge for which people cannot set a limit. Indeed they cannot obtain or record it all, let alone comprehend it." Shaykh 'Abdur-Rahmān as-Sa'dī added, "These things [seas, trees, pens, ink, etc.] are created, and all created things have an end. But the words of Allāh are of His attributes, which are not created and [hence] have no limit or end. However great a capacity one might imagine, Allāh is greater than that. And so are all of His attributes such as His knowledge, His wisdom, His ability and His mercy..."

... Āyah 110 ...

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلاً صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا ﴿١١﴾

Say, "I am only a man like you, to whom has been revealed that your god is one God. So whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord – let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone."

The *sūrah* ends as it began with the mention of prophethood and *tawheed*. In this final verse the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) is instructed to state that while he receives revelation from Allāh, he is not at all divine or superhuman but is of the same physical nature as other men. He is to declare that he is no more than a human being who follows the guidance he receives from his Lord, that he is taught through the revelation whatever Allāh should will and then he teaches it to others, and that he has no power or ability except what has been given him by Allāh. This was confirmation to those who denied him that what he recited of

¹⁶⁶*Sūrah Luqmān*, 31:27.

the Qur'ān was indeed a revelation from Allāh; otherwise, how could he have informed them about *ashāb al-kahf* and Dhul-Qarnayn? And why was he unable to inform them at the time he had initially promised?

The Messenger (ﷺ) is instructed as well to mention the most important fact revealed to him: that Allāh is the one and only single, indivisible and incomparable God. There is but one Lord for the entire universe; He is its Creator, Sustainer and Disposer of affairs. He is Allāh, who has no equal. Nothing can challenge His authority or oppose His will, and therefore nothing other than Him is worthy of worship – no object, person or creation of any kind. This is the essence of the message sent to mankind through every one of the prophets. Allāh stated in the Qur'ān:

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الظُّلْمَوْتَ

"And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], 'Worship Allāh and avoid false gods.'"¹⁶⁷

And each of His messengers was ordered to say:

يَقُولُ أَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ

"O people, worship Allāh; you have no deity other than Him."¹⁶⁸

In conclusion, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) is ordered to advise believers who wish to obtain their Lord's acceptance and reward in the Hereafter to do righteous deeds¹⁶⁹ without committing any form of *shirk*.¹⁷⁰ For this is the only means by which to earn the approval and appreciation of Allāh. Ibn Katheer explained: "**So whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord**" means: [hopes for] His reward; and "**let him do righteous work**" means: that which is in accordance with the laws of Allāh.

These final words of the *sūrah* are cited by scholars as clear evidence that a person's deeds will not be acceptable to Allāh unless they fulfill two basic conditions:

1. Sincerity of intention towards Allāh, which means that one's words and actions, both outward and inward, are intended for the acceptance of Allāh and nothing else. The deed must be done for Him alone, to seek His pleasure and prevent His anger. Even ordinary daily tasks become acts of worship when performed with this in mind. Integrity and precision in every deed is required by Allāh and rewarded by Him.

¹⁶⁷Or false objects of worship, expressed by the word *tāghīt*. The Qur'ānic quotation is *Sūrah an-Nahl*, 16:36.

¹⁶⁸7:59, 7:65, 7:73, 7:85, 11:50, 11:61, 11:84, 23:23 and 23:32.

¹⁶⁹Righteous deeds are those ordained in the Islāmic *Shari‘ah*.

¹⁷⁰Literally, "partnership" or "sharing." Islāmically, it means considering any created thing or being as having divine attributes or abilities similar to those belonging to Allāh.

2. Correctness – The deed must be one that is in accordance with the directives Allāh has given, i.e., lawful according to His ordained religion and done correctly in reference to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of His Messenger (ﷺ), without neglecting any obligation or introducing any new form of worship.

An action carried out according to misguided customs, unlawful innovations or personal preferences can be faulted in both these categories. The two essential conditions are important concepts of *tawheed*, the application of which protects one from falling into the sin of *shirk*. Major *shirk* is any form of polytheism, and it concerns the obedience and worship of other beings beside or instead of Allāh. The Qur’ān states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرِكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ

"Indeed, Allāh does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills."¹⁷¹

The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) warned additionally against minor *shirk*. This is not usually evident to others because it involves acts of worship ordained by Allāh. But rather than being done only for the acceptance of Allāh, they are performed seeking a worldly benefit (such as praise or admiration) as well.¹⁷² The Prophet said, "*The thing I fear most for you is minor shirk, [which is] showing off. Allāh will say on the Day of Resurrection when people are compensated for their deeds, 'Go to those for whom you were showing off in the world and see if you will find with them any reward.'*"¹⁷³

In another *hadīth* the Prophet (ﷺ) disclosed that Allāh, the Exalted, says: "*I am the most self-sufficient of partners, needing no partnership; so if one does a deed for Me and for another [simultaneously], then I am disassociated from it, and it is [only] for the [other] partner.*"¹⁷⁴

Sūrah al-Kahf concludes by providing the key to salvation and success in the Hereafter. Remaining steadfast on the foundation of *tawheed* is the essential factor, and it is the practical implementation by every Muslim of his words, *lā ilāha ill-Allāh*. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) remained in Makkah for thirteen years inviting everyone to *tawheed* and warning against *shirk*. Makkan revelations, among them *Sūrah al-Kahf*, were focused on establishing sound faith based upon *tawheed*, and once it had become firm within the hearts of Muslim people, religious obligations began to be revealed.

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

¹⁷¹ *Sūrah an-Nisā'*, 4:48 and 4:116.

¹⁷² When the same deed is done purely for a worldly benefit rather than Allāh, it becomes an act of hypocrisy (*nifāq*).

¹⁷³ Ahmād – ṣaḥīḥ.

¹⁷⁴ Ahmād, Muslim and Ibn Mājah – ṣaḥīḥ.

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