

may deny it verbally. Therefore, the earlier verse (29) has already covered it by saying: "whether you conceal what is in your hearts, or disclose it, Allah shall know it." No denial or false claim is tenable before Him.

Verses 31 - 32

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ
 ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾ قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ
 فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Say (O Prophet): "If you do love Allah, follow me; Allah shall love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful." [31]

Say: "Obey Allah and the Messenger." Then, should they turn back, Allah does not love the disbelievers." [32]

Sequence

In previous verses, there was affirmation of Allah's Oneness and the condemnation of disbelief in it. Affirmed now is the belief in prophethood as well as the necessity of following the Messenger so that we stand informed that the rejection of prophethood or refusal to obey the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is also an act of disbelief (*kufr*) like the rejection of the Oneness of Allah.

Commentary

Love is something secret. Whether or not a person loves another person, or loves less or more, are questions which cannot be answered precisely. There is no measure or yard-stick to determine the truth of the matter except that one makes an educated guess based on visible conditions and dealings, for love leaves traces and signs which could help in recognizing it as such. Now, in these verses, Allah Almighty tells those who claimed that they loved Allah and hoped to be loved by Him above the real criterion of His love. In other words, if a person living in the world of today claims that he loves his Creator and Master, then, he must test it on the touch-stone of his obedience to the Messenger, that is, match it against the frequency and quality of where and how he has been following him. Once this is done, the genuine and the fake of it will be exposed right there. How much true a person

turns out to be in his claim will be visible from how much he makes it a point to follow the noble prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, using the guidance brought by him as the guiding force in his life. The same test will show that the weaker a person is in his claim, so equally weak he shall be in his obedience to the prophet.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said:

He who obeyed Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم obeyed Allah and he who disobeyed Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم disobeyed Allah. (Tafsir Mazhari, v.2)

Verses 33 - 34

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾ ذُرِّيَّةً بَعْضُهَا مِن بَعْضٍ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

Verily, Allah has chosen Ādam and Nūḥ and the House of Ib-rāhīm and the House of 'Imrān over the worlds, [33] some of them being a progeny of the others. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. [34]

In these verses a reference has been made to some past prophets to comfort the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم since disbelievers did not obey him because they doubted his prophethood. It is for their guidance that names of some past prophets have been cited to help remove such doubts. However, these prophets have been referred to very briefly as the main purpose is to mention Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام which follows immediately because he will come again to this world and will work with the followers of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, therefore, it is necessary for the Muslims to know his identification.

Verses 35 - 36

إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٥﴾ فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتْهَا قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعْتُهَا أُنْثَىٰ ۖ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعْتَ ۖ وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنْثَىٰ ۖ وَإِنِّي سَمَّيْتُهَا مَرْيَمَ وَإِنِّي

﴿٣٦﴾ أُعِيذُهَا بِكَ وَذَرَرْتَهَا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

When 'Imran's wife said: "O my Lord, I have vowed what is in my womb to be exclusively for You. So, accept (it) from me. You, certainly You, are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing." [35]

So, when she delivered her, she said: "O my Lord, I have delivered her, a female child" - and Allah knows better what she has delivered, and the male is not like the female - "and I have named her Maryam, and I place her and her progeny under Your shelter against Satan, the rejected." [36]

Commentary:

In the religious code of earlier prophets, there was a method of worship through which a child, out of one's children, could be freed from all worldly services and devoted exclusively for Allah. Following this practice, the mother of Sayyidah Maryam made a vow during her pregnancy that she would let the newborn serve Baitul-Maqdis in the way of Allah and that she would not put the child on worldly chores. Sayyidah Maryam's mother thought that she will deliver a male child. But, when she delivered a girl, she was full of remorse thinking that a girl would not be able to do this duty. But Allah Almighty, out of His consideration for the sincerity of Sayyidah Maryam's mother, accepted that very girl and thereby made her status distinct from any other girl of the world.

From here we learn that a mother holds a certain measure of guardianship over her child in respect of his or her education and training, for Sayyidah Maryam's mother would have never vowed if the mother had no right of guardianship over her child. Similarly, it proves that a mother too has the right to give a name to her child. (al-Jaṣṣāṣ)

Verse 37

فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَنْبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَمْرِئُؤُنِي لِكَ هَذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِرِزْقٍ مِنْ شَيْءٍ يُغَيِّرِ حِسَابَ ﴿٣٧﴾

So, her Lord accepted her, a good acceptance, and made her grow, a good growth, and made Zakariyya her guardian. Whenever Zakariyya visited her in the Arch, he found with her some food. He said: "Maryam, from where has it come for you?" She said: "It is from Allah. Surely, Allah gives whom He wills without measure." [37]

Commentary

In order to fulfil her vow, Sayyidah Maryam's mother took her to the Mosque of Baitul-Maqdis and talked to the care-takers and worshippers at the Mosque, Sayyidnā Zakariyyā being one of them, and told them that she had vowed to dedicate the child in the service of God and therefore, she could not keep the child with her. She asked them to take her and keep her.

Sayyidnā 'Imrān was the Imām of this Mosque. He had died during the pregnancy of Maryam's mother, otherwise he would have been the most deserving person to have taken charge of the child, being the father and the Imām of the Mosque. Therefore, every keeper and worshipper of the Mosque wished to take her in his custody. Sayyidnā Zakariyyā pleaded his bid for custody by saying that his wife was Maryam's aunt and she being next to her mother certainly deserved to keep her. But, people did not agree to prefer him over the others. Finally, everybody agreed to draw lots, which turned out to be fairly strange as it would appear later. Here too, it was Sayyidnā Zakariyyā عليه السلام who turned out to be the winner.

So, he got custody of Maryam. According to some reports, he employed a wet-nurse to have her suckled. Other reports say that she just did not need to be suckled. She grew up able to sit and walk and Sayyidnā Zakariyyā عليه السلام put her in a good house adjacent to the Mosque. When he went out, he locked the house and opened it on return. This has been stated briefly in the present verse.

Verse 38

هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً
طَيِّبَةً إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ ﴿٣٨﴾

Thereupon, Zakariyyā prayed to his Lord. He said: "O

my Lord, grant me from Your own (power) a goodly progeny. Verily, You are the listener of the prayer." [38]

Commentary

1. While looking at the first sentence of this verse - هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُ - (Thereupon, Zakariyyā prayed to his Lord) - we should bear in mind that Sayyidnā Zakariyyā had no offspring upto that time. He had grown old and one usually does not have children in that age, although he firmly believed that Allah, in His ultimate power, could change the usual phenomenon and bless him with an offspring even at his advanced age. But he had not personally witnessed the unusual divine acts - such as he did when he saw unusual and out-of-season eatables provided for Sayyidah Maryam - and that was why he did not have the courage to extend his hand of prayer for an offspring. Now when he saw the miracle with his own eyes, he was persuaded for such prayer under the belief that Allah, who can provide a servant with out-of-season fruits, would also bless him with an offspring, even in this late age, and so he prayed.

2. The second sentence of the verse - قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً - 'He said: "O my Lord, grant me from Your own (power) a goodly progeny."' - tells us that making prayers to have children is a blessed practice of the prophets and the righteous.

In another verse Allah Almighty has said: وَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُرْسَلًا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً "And We sent messengers before you and provided them with wives and children"- (13:38). It means that children are among the blessings of Allah which were bestowed on the Holy Prophet ﷺ as well as on other prophets.

Now, should someone try to stop the birth of children, by any means, he will not only rebel against nature but will also deprive himself of having acted in harmony with the common and agreed practice of prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم. The Holy Prophet of Islam ﷺ has given great importance to the question of marriage and children, so much so that he did not allow anyone to avoid married life and children inspite of his capability, and refused to take such a person as a member of his community of followers. He said:

(١) الْبَيْتَاحُ مِنْ سُنَّتِي

(۲) فَمَنْ رَغِبَ عَن سُنَّتِي فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي
 (۳) تَزَوَّجُوا الْوُدُودَ الْوَلُودَ فَإِنِّي مُكَافِئُ بِكُمْ الْأُمَّةَ

- (1) Marriage is my *sunnah* (way).
- (2) So, whoever turns away from my *sunnah*, he is not from me.
- (3) Therefore, marry a woman who is loving and fertile, for I shall compete with other communities on the basis of your numbers.

In another verse, Allah Almighty praises those who pray before Him to have a wife in marriage, have children and have them grow good and righteous. He says:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ

And those who say: "O our Lord, bless us with such among our wives and our children as be the delight of our eyes. (25:74)

Hasan al-Baṣrī, رحمه الله, says that the Qur'ānic expression - '*qurrata a'yun*' (literally: coolness or lustre of the eyes; meaning someone dearly loved and cherished) - here means that the maker of prayer sees his children and wife devoted in obedience to Allah.

It appears in a *ḥadīth* that Umm Sulaym رضى الله عنها requested the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to pray for his attendant, Sayyidnā Anas. He made the following prayer for him:

اللَّهُمَّ أَكْثِرْ مَالَهُ وَوَلَدَهُ وَبَارِكْ لَهُ فِيمَا أَعْطَيْتَهُ

O Allah, increase his wealth and his children and make him prosper in what You have bestowed on him.

It was the outcome of this very prayer that Sayyidnā Anas رضى الله عنه had about a hundred children and was also blessed with an ample measure of wealth.

Verse 39

فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلَكَةُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ يُصَلِّي فِي الْمِحْرَابِ أَنْ اللَّهَ يَشِيرُكَ
 بِبِحْيَى مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَوَسِيدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِنْ
 الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

So then, the angels called out to him, while he stood

praying in the Arch, saying: "Allah gives you the good news of Yaḥyā (John) who shall come to confirm a word of Allah and shall be a chief, abstinent (from women), a prophet and one of the righteous." [39]

Commentary

1. The expression, كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ : 'a word of Allah' refers to Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. This term is used for him because he was created, in an unusual manner, simply by the will and command of Allah - without a paternal linkage.

2. The second quality of Sayyidnā Yaḥyā has been described by the word, 'ḥaṣūr' translated here as 'abstinent'. It means that he was very particular about keeping himself shielded from temptations, that is, from things one habitually enjoys. When we say one abstains from enjoyments of life, the statement includes abstinence even from fulfilling the desires of things allowed, for example, good food, good dress and marital life and things like these. Since the quality of abstinence has been mentioned here in a positive frame of reference, it obviously seems to suggest that this is the better way, although *aḥadīth* prove the higher merit of living in the bond of marriage. In this situation, the considered opinion is that one whose condition is similar to that of Sayyidnā Yaḥyā عليه السلام and who is so absorbed in the thought of his life-to-come that he feels no need to have a wife nor has the time and frame of mind to fulfil the rights of his wife and children, then, for such a person this is the better choice. It is because of this particular reason that *aḥadīth* which describe the merit of marriage come up with a restrictive clause as well, that is, مِنَ اسْتَطَاعَ مِنْكُمُ الْبَاءَةُ which means that one who can marry and is capable of fulfilling the due rights of his wife, should marry, for this is better for him; otherwise, he is not advised to marry. (Bayān al-Qur'an)

Verses 40 - 41

قَالَ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي غُلْمٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَنِيَ الْكِبَرُ وَامْرَأَتِي عَاقِرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ ﴿٤٠﴾ قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً قَالَ آيَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ إِلَّا رَمْطًا وَأَذْكُرُ

رَبِّكَ كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ بِالْعِشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَارِ ﴿٤١﴾

He said: "O my Lord, how shall I have a boy when old age has come upon me and my wife is barren?" Said He: "That is how Allah does what He wills." [40]

He said: "O my Lord, set for me a sign." Said He: "Your sign is that you shall not be able to speak to people for three days except through gestures. And remember your Lord much and proclaim His purity at evening and at morning." [41]

Commentary

We have already seen that Sayyidnā Zakariyyā عليه السلام believed in the absolute power of Allah and had seen its manifestation repeatedly and that he had himself made the prayer and knew of its acceptance as well, what then, did he mean by asking: 'how shall I have a boy?' The truth of the matter is that the question asked by him was not because of any doubt in the absolute power of Allah. Quite contrary to this, the purpose of the question was to find out the state in which this was to happen: whether the present extreme old age of both of them would remain just as it was, or would that state be changed. The eloquent reply given in كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ (That is how Allah does what He wills) makes it clear that they were to remain at the same age and that they would have an offspring in that very state. This resolves any doubt that may be entertained at this point. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

2. With reference to verse 41, Sayyidnā Zakariyyā's purpose behind requesting a sign (of pregnancy) was to be happy at the prospect and thus be enabled to show their gratitude all along even prior to the actual birth of the child. So, Allah gave him the sign stated above.

The sign given was remarkably suitable to its purpose. His request for a sign was prompted by his wish to show his gratefulness. Now, the sign set for him leaves him incapable of doing anything but this. Even a hundred signs would have not done what this one sign did and, of course, the noble purpose he had on his mind was all too well-accomplished. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

3. The last phrase: إِلَّا زَمْرًا (except through gestures) in this verse tells us that in a situation where speech is not possible because of a

valid reason, gesture would be deemed as its substitute. Consequently, it appears in a *ḥadīth* that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم asked a maid-servant: اين الله ('Where is Allah?'). She pointed out towards the sky. He said: 'This maid-servant is a Muslim.' (al-Qurtubī)

Verses 42 - 43

وَاذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَكَةُ يَمْرُومُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَكَ وَطَهَّرَكَ وَاصْطَفَاكِ
عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾ يَمْرُومُ أَقْنَتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي
وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

And when the angels said: "O Maryam, Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you over the women of all the worlds. [42] O Maryam, stand in devotion to your Lord, and prostrate and bow down with those who bow." [43]

Commentary

1. In verse 42, the sentence: *وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ* (and has chosen you over women of all the worlds) refers to all women in that period of time. Therefore, the statement *سَيِّدَةُ نِسَاءِ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ فَاطِمَةُ* (Fatimah is the foremost among women of the Paradise) appearing in *ḥadīth* does not contradict it.

2. It will be noticed that, in the last sentence of verse 43: *وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ* (and bow down with those who bow) while giving an order to bow down, the imperative has been qualified with the words "with those who bow" - but no such qualification appears while giving an order of prostration. This apparently seems to hint that people generally do not observe due concern while making *rukū'* (bowing). They tend to bend a little, then resume the standing position (as if in a hurry). This kind of *rukū'* (bowing) is closer to standing (*qiyām*). As said earlier, it apparently seems to suggest that Allah Almighty, by mentioning the qualification 'those who bow', has given a model to be followed so that one's bowing in prayer could become similar to those who bow fully and perfectly as due.

Verse 44

ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذِ يُتْلُونَ

أَفَلَا مَهُمُ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ ۚ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذِ يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

This is a part of the news of the unseen We reveal to you. And you were not with them when they were casting their pens (to decide) who from among them should be the guardian of Maryam, nor were you with them when they were quarreling. [44]

Commentary

This verse presents an argument to prove the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم by referring to happenings in the lives of Sayyidnā Zakariyyā and Sayyidah Maryam عليهما السلام. These took place in the remote past and there is no likelihood of their being seen or heard or read, specially so, by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, which by itself proves that his being so informed of the unknown was beyond the ordinary course of learning. He had just no way of finding out such details by any obvious means at his command. Hence, the truth is that this information was revealed to him as part of the message he gave to others. The text very eloquently states that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was not there to see them drawing lots (by throwing their reed pens in water, based on prior agreement that the owner of the pen which flows against the current shall be the winner), nor was he present on the scene when they were initially quarreling about the custody of Maryam before agreeing upon the drawing of lots.

The rule governing *Qur'ah* (فرعة) (to the drawing of lots) according to Ḥanafī jurists, is that *Qur'ah* (drawing of lots) cannot be given a decisive role in determining the rights known and fixed in Islamic Law. Drawing lots in such a situation is included under *Qimār* (gambling). For example, if something is jointly owned by several persons and a lot is drawn to decide that the one whose name comes out in the lot shall take the whole thing; or, in the case of a child whose parentage is disputed, a lot is drawn and the one whose name comes out in the lot drawn is taken to be the father. Drawing lots in such cases is not allowed in Shari'ah. As for rights which depend upon opinion, *Qur'ah* is permissible in them, for instance, while allotting portions of a joint property, A is given the eastern portion and B, the western, by drawing a lot. This is permissible because this was permissible even without having to draw lots by a mutual agreement of the parties con-

cerned or by a decree of a judge. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

In other words, it can be said that in a situation where the rights of all parties are equal and the purpose of the lot is only to allocate equal portions to each of them and to decide as to which portion is for whom, then drawing a lot is permissible.

Verses 45 - 46

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ
عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾
وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

When the angels said: "O Maryam, Allah gives you the good news of a word from Him whose name is Masīḥ 'Īsā, the son of Maryam (the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary) a man of status in this world and in the Hereafter and one of the nearest. [45] And he shall speak to the people in the cradle as well as in the middle age, and shall be one of the righteous." [46]

The previous verse (44) appeared parenthetically between the present verses 45 - 46 and verses 42 - 43 and the purpose was to affirm the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. The present verse resumes with the story of Sayyidah Maryam which actually prepares the ground for a fuller account of the birth, mission and miracles of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام.

Commentary

One of the qualities of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام mentioned in this verse is that 'he shall speak in the cradle' which means that he will speak while still a child, although no child has the ability to do so. When soon after the birth of infant Jesus, as mentioned in another verse, people chided Sayyidah Maryam on the basis of a false accusation, this new-born infant, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام spoke up, saying: انى عبد الله (I am a servant of Allah). Then following immediately, it was said that he will also talk to people when he will be in the later middle of his age (*kahl*). It is worth noting here that the incidence of speaking in infancy was certainly a sign and a miracle and it is quite appropriate to mention it at this point. But, speaking to people during one's middle age is very normal, something everyone does no matter whether he is

a Muslim, or a non-Muslim, learned or illiterate. Why has this been mentioned here as something special? What could it mean?

One answer to this question appears in Bayān al-Qur'an by Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī who says that the real purpose here is to particularly focus on the miraculous nature of meaningful infant speech. The reference to the speech in the middle age is there to indicate that his childhood speech too would not be the usual baby-talk, rather it would be rational, even learned and eloquent, as man does in his advanced years. If we were to look into the true historical background of Sayyidnā 'Īsā, we would discover that this reference to him as speaking to people in his middle age provides a great standing argument in favour of the Islamic position which, according to the Qur'anic belief, is that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام has been raised alive onto the heavens.

Hadīth narrations prove that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام, while so raised, was in the approximate age bracket of 30-35 years which is youth at its best. Middle age, *kahl* in Arabic, was something he never reached during his life in this world. So, his talking to people in his middle age can happen only when he were to grace this world once again with his presence. Therefore, the way his childhood speech was a miracle, his speech in the middle age could be nothing else but another miracle.

Verse 47

قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٧﴾

She said: "O my Lord, how shall I have a son while no human has ever touched me?" Said He: "That is how Allah creates what He wills." When He decides a matter, He simply says to it "Be", and it happens." [47]

The glad tidings given by the angel (verse 46) regarding the birth of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام without a father surprised Sayyidah Maryam as she was a virgin. She wondered how would it happen. Would that be a Divine miracle or would she be asked to marry a man? The Divine answer eliminates the latter possibility. Not restricted by it, 'Allah creates what He wills', that is, His will is all sufficient to bring something into existence. He needs no medium or cause. It is only His com-

mand "be" which makes things come into existence.

Verses 48 - 51

وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَرَسُولًا
إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ ۖ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ
لَكُمْ مِّنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ
اللَّهِ ۖ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ ۖ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ
لَآيَةً لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ
التَّوْرَةِ وَلِأَحْلَلْ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ
مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ
فَاعْبُدُوهُ ۗ هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٥١﴾

And He shall teach him the Book and the Wisdom, and the Torah and the Injil, [48] and (shall make him) a messenger to the Children of Isra'īl (who will say to them): "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that is, I create for you from clay something in the shape of a bird, then I blow in it, and it becomes a living bird with the will of Allah; and I cure the born-blind and the leper and I cause the dead to become alive with the will of Allah; and I tell you of what you eat and what you store in your homes. In it there is surely a sign for you, if you are believers." [49]

"And (I have come to you) confirming what is before me, the Torah, and to make permissible for you some of what was prohibited to you. And I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. So, fear Allah and obey me. [50] Allah is surely my Lord and your Lord. So, worship Him. This is the straight path." [51]

1. Verse 48 recounts the august virtues of Sayyidnā 'Īsā who would be born blessed with the honour of learning from Allah: Scriptures, Wisdom and specially the Torah and the Injil; and that he will be sent as a Messenger of Allah to all of the Children of Isra'īl.

2. The message he will carry to them will be his argument in favour of his prophethood. In order that they believe, enumerated in verse 49, there are four signs or miracles that he would perform, being enough for willing believers.

3. Verse 50 says that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will declare that he has come to confirm Torah which was revealed before his coming and to make lawful what remained unlawful for them in the law of Moses. This means that the unlawfulness of some things in the earlier code would stand abrogated by the new one, (that of Sayyidnā 'Īsā) whose station of prophethood was the conclusive argument for that claim of abrogation. The proof of his truth were the signs from their Lord.

4. Once his prophethood is established, verse 51 states that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will ask them to beware of any contravention of Divine commandments, fear Allah, and follow his teachings in matters of religion which, in a nutshell, are that 'Allah is my Lord and your Lord' (the ultimate in belief) and 'Worship Him' (the ultimate in deeds). This, then, is the straight path which helps perfect the ideal combination of beliefs and deeds, leads to the way of salvation and is the source of communion with Allah.

Ruling:

Making the shape of a bird was the making of a picture, something permitted in that Shari'ah. In our Shari'ah, its permissibility was abrogated.

Verses 52 - 53

فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ
 قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّا
 مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾ رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُبْنَا
 مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

So, when 'Īsā sensed disbelief in them, he said: "Who are my helpers in the way of Allah?" The disciples said: "We are helpers of Allah. We believe in Allah; and be witness that we are Muslims." [52]

"Our Lord, we have believed in what You have re-

vealed, and we have followed the messenger. So, write us down with those who bear witness." [53]

Following blessed predictions mentioned earlier, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was born with all promised signs. As a messenger sent to Banī Isrā'īl, he presented his call to them supported by miracles to prove his prophethood. But, the Banī Isrā'īl were adamant and kept on rejecting him as a prophet, even going to the limit of being physically hostile to him.

The text now identifies the very first followers of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام, brings to light their real creed, expressed first before their prophet and then (in verse 53), reiterated it in the form of a prayer before their Lord.

Commentary

The word, *ḥawārīyy* (singular of *'al-ḥawārīyyūn'*) appearing in verse 52 (translated as 'the disciples'), is a derivation from *ḥawār* which lexically means whiteness. In the religious terminology, the title of *'ḥawārīyy*' has been given to the sincere disciples or companions of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام either because of their sincerity or the purity of their heart, or because of their white dress. Likewise, the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم have been called, *ṣaḥābīyy* (plural, *saḥābah*).

Some commentators have given the number of the disciples as twelve. Incidentally, the word *'ḥawārīyy*' is also, at times, used in the absolute sense of 'helper' or 'supporter'. It is in this very sense that it was said in a *ḥadīth*: "Every prophet has a *ḥawārīyy*, that is, a sincere companion; Zubair is my *ḥawārīyy*' (Tafsīr al-Qurtubī)

An Important Note:

Verse 52 states that Sayyidnā 'Īsā looked for helpers in the way of Allah only when he sensed hostility from disbelievers, and not at the initial stage of his call. As obvious, he had risen to the task all alone obeying the command of his Lord without worrying about setting up a 'party' in advance. When came the need, he found a group around him. A little thought here would show that every worthy mission demands such determination and courage.

Verses 54 - 55

وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾ إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ
 لِيَعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ سَلِّمْ عَلَيَّ إِنَّكَ رَافِعٌ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهَّرٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ
 كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ
 الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ
 تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

And they made a move, and Allah made a move. And Allah is the best of those who make moves. [54]

When Allah said: "O 'Īsā, I am to take you in full and raise you towards Myself, and cleanse you of those who disbelieve, and place those who follow you above those who disbelieve, upto the Day of Doom. Then to Me is your return, whereupon I shall judge between you in what you have been differing in." [55]

Commentary

In these verses the miraculous event of the Ascension of Sayyidnā 'Īsā (Jesus Christ) has been mentioned. "And they made a move" refers to the evil designs of the Jews who planned to arrest him and to get him crucified.

The next sentence i.e. "and Allah made a move" refers to the plan designed by Allah Almighty to save his prophet 'Īsā from their ill designs. They sent one of them to Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام to arrest him and Allah changed his face totally and made him resemble Sayyidnā 'Īsā and raised Sayyidnā 'Īsā to heavens, while that person was crucified under the mistaken identity. How Allah had planned to save 'Īsā عليه السلام from their clutches was disclosed to him when his enemies came to arrest him. The details of these disclosures have been mentioned in verse 55.

Explanation of important words in the verse

Some sects which deny, contrary to the belief of the entire Muslim community, the Ascension of Sayyidnā 'Īsā (Jesus Christ), his being alive in the heavens and his descension towards the later times, have

worked through the words and meanings of these verses to open doors of distortion in the Qur'anic text. Therefore, it seems appropriate that these words be explained in some details.

Let us begin with *وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ الْمَأْكُرِينَ* translated as 'and Allah is the best of those who make moves'. The word, *makr* in Arabic denotes a subtle and secret move or plan. If this is for a good purpose, it is good; and if this is for a bad purpose, it is bad. It was why the restriction of *saiyy* (سين : evil) was placed with *makr* (مكر : move, plan) in: *وَلَا يَحِثُّ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهْلِهِ* (And evil plan besets none but its perpetrator - 35:43).

The Qur'anic word, *makr*, is used exclusively for conspiracy, evil plan and strategy in the everyday idiom of the Urdu language (in which this commentary was originally written), therefore, it should not be equated with the Arabic usage. This is the reason why Allah has been called: *خَيْرُ الْمَأْكُرِينَ* : '*Khair al-Mākirīn*' here.

The verse means that the Jews started making a series of conspiracies and secret schemes against Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام going to the limit of convincing the ruler of the time that he was a heretic (God forbid) all bent upon changing the Torah and was going to make apostates of everybody. The ruler ordered the arrest of Sayyidnā 'Īsā. While this was the scene on one side, the subtle and secret move made by Allah Almighty was countering their evil plans more effectively, which has been mentioned in the verses coming next.

The word, '*Mutawaffi*' in *إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ* takes '*tawaffi*' as its verbal noun with its root being '*wafyun.*' Lexically, the word means 'to take in full'. This being its real meaning, its derivations *wafā*, *ifā* and '*istifā*' are used to convey that sense. In fact, the real meaning of *tawaffi* is 'to take in full' which is universally confirmed by all lexicons of the Arabic language. Since man completes his appointed time at the hour of death and the spirit or soul given by Allah is taken back fully and conclusively, it is in that context that this word is also used figuratively in the sense of death. A simple form of death is the daily sleep of human beings. For this too, the Holy Qur'an uses the same word when it says:

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا

'Allah takes away lives of the living at the time of their death and of those that do not die, in their sleep'. (39:42)

Hāfiz Ibn Taimiyyah says in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (v. 2, p. 83):

التوفى فى لغة العرب معناها القبض والاستيفاء وذلك ثلاثة انواع،
أحدها التوفى فى النوم، والثانى توفى الموت، والثالث توفى الروح والبدن
جميعاً

Al-tawaffī, in the Arabic language, means: to exact fully or take in full. It takes three forms; the first: to take in sleep; the second: to take in death; and the third: to take the soul and the body all together.

In *Kulliyāt Abū al-Baqā'*, it is said:

التوفى الاماتة وقبض الروح، وعليه استعمال العامة او الاستيفاء واخذ
الحق وعليه استعمال البلغاء

Al-tawaffī is putting to death and exacting of the soul in common usage while, in the classical usage, it is taking in full and the exacting of the due right.

Therefore, the majority of scholars have translated the word, متوفىك: '*mutawaffika*' in the verse under study in the sense of 'taking in full'. This means that Allah will not leave Sayyidnā 'Īsā in the hands of the Jews, rather He would take him away which would be in the form that he would be risen unto Him in the heavens.

This is how the words 'I am to take you in full' have been interpreted by the majority of the scholars. However, some authentic commentators of the Holy Qur'ān have interpreted these words in the sense of 'giving death' also, but they do not mean that the death of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will occur at the hands of his enemies. The true meaning of the verse, according to these commentators is as follows:

Allah Almighty said two things to comfort Jesus at a time when the Jews were bent on killing him. One: That his death will come, not at their hands in the form of killing, but that it would be a natural death. Two: In order to rescue him from the evil designs of those people, Allah Almighty will, at that time, raise Jesus towards Him. This explanation is exactly what has been reported from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه as quoted by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Durr al-Manthūr* v. 2, p. 36 on the authority of several narrators.

The gist of this *tafsīr* or explanation is that *tawaffī* does mean giving death, but there is the element of precedence and sequence in the words used. The fact of *رَأَيْتُكَ* (I shall raise you) will come first and that of *مُتَوَفِّيكَ* (I shall give you death) later. Now at this point, the wisdom behind mentioning the phenomenon of the earlier lies in the hint that it gives about the events which are to come later on. It means that raising towards Allah will not last for ever; it would be temporary and then, he would return to the mortal world and prevail over enemies and later on, death will come to him in a natural way.

Thus, the event of his return from heaven and his death after having established his victory in the world was not only a miracle but a consummation of the honour and integrity of Jesus, عليه السلام. In addition to that, the unfounded Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus was also refuted. Had it not been so, the event of Jesus being raised towards the heavens alive would have further strengthened their false belief that he too was Living and Eternal like Allah. Therefore, by introducing the word *مُتَوَفِّيكَ* (pointing out to his death) first, all those misconceptions which might have arisen from 'raising of Jesus' have been refuted in advance.

The reality is that disbelievers and polytheists have always been vehemently opposed to prophets, عليهم السلام. And parallel to that there has been the customary practice of Allah - when a people unto whom a prophet has been sent stick to their own opinion, do not listen to the prophet and do not believe in him even after having witnessed the miracles, then, one of the following two counter-actions were taken: Either those people were annihilated through some natural calamity as was done with 'Ād and Thamūd and the peoples of Prophets Lūṭ and Ṣāliḥ عليهم السلام; or, alternatively Allah would instruct His prophet to migrate from the habitat of disbelievers and go to some other place. It was there that they were provided with such power and glory that they finally achieved victory against the people whom they were sent to. For example Prophet Ibrāhīm, عليه السلام migrated from Iraq and sought refuge in Syria. Similarly, Prophet Mūsā (Moses) عليه السلام, migrated from Egypt and came to Madyan. Finally, the Last prophet, Muḥammad ﷺ migrated from Makkah and came to Madīnah. It was from there that he finally attacked Makkah and conquered it. This raising of Jesus to

the heavens to outmaneuver the threatening designs of the Jews was, in fact, an act of emigration in its own way following which he would return to this world and achieve total victory over the Jews.

Now comes the question as to why this emigration of his, quite separate from the rest, has the heavens as the destination? So, for that matter, Allah Almighty has Himself said about him that his case is like that of Ādam, عليه السلام. The way in which Ādam's birth differs from the normal birth of the rest of creation, (i.e., without a father and a mother) so it is that the birth of Jesus took a miraculous form different from the normal birth of human beings; and his death too, taking a unique and unmatched form, will materialize after hundreds of years following his return to the world -- unprecedented indeed. Why then, should one be surprised if his emigration too follows some such unique pattern?

These marvels of nature led the ignorant among Christians into believing and declaring that he was God, while deliberation into the various aspects of these very marvels, are clear proofs of his servitude as a human being to God, obedience to the Divine will and the demonstration of human traits. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'an has made a pointed reference to the refutation of belief in the Godhood of Jesus on all such occasions. The raising towards the heavens would have made this doubt all the more strong. Therefore, by bringing the word *mutawaffika* (I am to take you in full) earlier, this doubt was totally eliminated. Thus we come to realize that this verse, no doubt, aims at negating the Jewish plans since they were all set to crucify and kill Jesus, عليه السلام, and that Allah Almighty made their plans come to nothing. Moreover, this precedence and sequence of words became the mode of refuting the Christians as well, that Jesus was no God who was never to die but that a time will come when he too will meet his death.

In his Tafsīr Imām al-Rāzī has said that such precedence and sequence occurs frequently in the noble Qur'an in order to cover similar expedient considerations under which an event due later has been mentioned first while an event due earlier has been placed after that. (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, v. 2, p. 48)

As for *رَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ* (And I shall raise you towards Me), the meaning is clear. Addressing Jesus here, it has been said: 'I shall raise you to-

wards Me'. Every one knows that Jesus is not the name of just the spirit but that of the spirit and the body of Jesus. Now taking the raising of Jesus in the sense that the act of raising was spiritual only, and not physical, is all wrong. As far as the word, *raf*' (رَفَعَ : raising) is concerned, there are occasions when it is also used to indicate raising of ranks as it appears in the following verses of the noble Qur'an:

رَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ

... And raised some of you in ranks over others (6:165).

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ

... and Allah will raise up in rank those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge (58:11).

So, it is obvious that the word, *raf*' : raising, in the sense of the raising of rank or status has been used figuratively in view of the context of the aforementioned verses. There is no reason here to ignore the real meaning and go by that which is figurative. Moreover, by using the word, *ilā* : إلى (towards) alongwith the word, *raf*' (رَفَعَ : raising), at this particular place, the possibility of such a figurative meaning has been totally eliminated. What is said in this verse is رَافِعَكَ إِلَيَّ : *rāfi'uka ilaiyya*: I shall raise you towards Me. Then there is the verse from Sūrah al-Nisā' (4:158), which refutes the belief of Jews; there too, what was said is: وَمَا قَتَلُوا نَبِيًّا بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ that is, the Jews certainly did not kill Jesus, instead, Allah raised him towards Himself. This later expression is used for nothing but the raising alive of the spirit and the body.

Explained this far were the words of the verse.

Allah Almighty's Five Promises to Jesus

In the verse under reference, Allah Almighty made five promises to 'Īsā عليه السلام vis-a-vis the Jews:

1. The first promise was that his death will not come at the hands of the Jews through killing. It will be a natural death coming at its appointed time and that appointed time will come close to the Day of Doom, when 'Īsā عليه السلام will come down from the heavens onto the earth as reported in details in sound aḥādīth transmitted through unbroken chains, part of which will appear later.

2. The second promise was to raise him towards the heavens in the

existing situation. This was fulfilled right then. The report of this fulfillment was given in Sūrah al-Nisā' (4:158) by saying:

وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ

Certainly, the Jews did not kill him, instead; Allah Almighty raised him towards Himself.

3. The third promise was: وَمُطَهِّرَكُم مِّنَ الذَّنْبِ كَفْرًا, that is, to have him cleansed of false accusations brought on him by his enemies. That promise was fulfilled when the last of the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم came and refuted all false accusations of the Jews. For instance, the Jews threw slanders on the parentage of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام because of his having been born without a father. The noble Qur'ān refuted this slander by declaring that he was born without a father because such was the power and will of Allah. And that too does not call for much of a surprise. More surprising is the birth of Ādam since he was born without both a father and a mother.

The Jews accused Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام of claiming to be God. There are many verses in the noble Qur'ān in which, contrary to this accusation, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام has been reported to have publicly confessed his being human and a servant and bondsman of Allah.

4. The fourth promise appears in (وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا) (and placed those who follow you above those who disbelieve) which means that his followers will be made to overcome those who deny and oppose him. This promise was fulfilled in the sense that following here means the belief in and confession of the prophethood of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. The belief in and the practice of all injunctions ascribed to him is not a pre-condition. Thus the Christians and the Muslims both fall in this category as they believe in the prophethood and messengership of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. However, this is a different matter that holding this much of belief is not enough to bring forth salvation in the Hereafter. Instead, the salvation in the Hereafter depends on believing in all injunctions brought by Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. One of the instructions given by Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was that his followers should believe and have faith in the last of the Prophets (صلى الله عليه وسلم), who would come after Jesus departs. The Christians did not follow this instruction in matters of faith and belief, therefore, they deprived them-

selves of salvation in the Hereafter while Muslims acted in accordance with that too, therefore, they became deserving of salvation in the Hereafter. But, part of the promise which relates to having dominant authority over Jews was dependent on the prophethood of Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام only. That dominance in the world has always been the fate of Christians and Muslims vis-a-vis the Jews, and surely, so shall it be through the Day of Judgement.

From the time when Allah Almighty made this promise right upto now, it has always been the case that the Christians and Muslims have dominated the Jews. The world has seen the establishment of their empires. The existence of the present state of Israel cannot make the truth of this position doubtful for several reasons. To begin with, and in reality, this state is no more than a manifestation of the military might of Russia and the Christians of Euro-American origin which they have established and maintained against Muslims. As soon as Russia, America and countries of Europe withdraw their patronage, the world will itself witness the instant collapse of this state and its disappearance from the map of the world. Therefore, people who can see the reality do realise the actual position of Israel or the Government of the Jews. It is by no means a manifestation of the domination of Jews. If, just for the sake of argument, it is taken to be their own state, even then, who would - in his right frame of mind - deny that, given the totality of Christians and Muslims, they are wielders of lesser influence and are much subjugated with fear. Even if we were to leave this aspect aside, we know that a temporary domination by the Jews close to the Day of Judgement has been reported in the authentic reports of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Now if this world is destined to exist for any considerable period of time and if the Day of Judgement is close, that domination too is not contrary to the reports which Muslims consider authentic. Moreover, such short-lived occupation cannot be given the name of a state or government especially when it is based on a conspiracy hatched by the Christians and the communists.

5. The fifth promise, that of giving a decision in respect of such conflicts in faith on the Day of Judgement will certainly be fulfilled on its appointed time as it has been indicated in the verse:

ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ

Then, to Me is your return, whereupon I shall judge between you. (3:55)

JESUS: The question of his life and second coming:

The Jews are the only people in the world who say that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was crucified, killed and buried following which he never returned to life. What happened really and truly has been clarified in verse 158 of Sūrah al-Nisā' in the Holy Qur'an. Then, in مَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ (And they made a move, and Allah made a move.) of the present verse, it has been pointed out that Allah Almighty made the sinister move of the enemies of 'Īsā recoil upon those who had gone into the house to kill Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. It was one of them that Allah Almighty changed to look exactly like Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام and then He raised Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام alive onto the heavens. The words of the verse are as follows:

وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ

And they did not kill him and they did not crucify him, but they were deluded by resemblance (4:157).

Details regarding this will appear under the commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā'.

The Christians said that Jesus was, no doubt, killed on the cross but was brought back to life once again and raised onto the heavens. The verse under reference has refuted this false notion as well. It is stressed here that similar to the Jews who were rejoicing after killing their own man, the Christians fell a victim to the same mistaken identity by believing that it was Jesus who got killed on the Cross, and as such, the Christians too became the victims of mistaken identity. This is obvious from the Qur'anic statement شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ (they were deluded by resemblance) just like the Jews were deceived by mistaken identity.

As opposed to the view of these two groups, there is the Islamic belief, stated here in this verse and in several other verses clearly, which says that Allah Almighty raised him alive onto the heavens in order to rescue him from the Jews. He was not to be killed and he was not to be crucified. He is in the heavens alive and it will be close to the Day of Judgement when he shall come down from the heavens, lead the Mus-

lms to victory over the Jews, and finally, he will die a natural death.

There is a consensus of the entire Muslim community on this belief. Ḥāfiẓ ibn Hajr, in his *Talkhīṣ al-Ḥabīr*, has reported this consensus (page 319). This belief, and the consensus of the community on it, stands proved on the authority of several verses of the Holy Qur'ān and reports from *mutawātir* aḥādīth transmitted through an unbroken chain of reporting. However, this is not the place for its detailed discussion, and not necessary either. The reason being that scholars of the community have already taken up this question in special books with full clarity giving detailed answers to those who dispute in the Ascension of the Christ. For instance, the Arabic work, '*Aqīdatu l'Islām fī Ḥayāti 'Īsā عليه السلام*' by Ḥujjatu l'Islām Maulānā Sayyid Muḥammad Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī, *Ḥayāt-e-'Īsā عليه السلام*, (the Life of Jesus) in Urdu by Ḥaḍrat Maulānā Badr 'Alam Muḥājir Madani, *Ḥayāt-e-Masiḥ عليه السلام* in Urdu by Maulānā Sayyid Muḥammad Idrīs and hundreds of other books or essays dealing with this question have been widely published and circulated. While carrying out the orders of his respected teacher, Maulānā Sayyid Muḥammad Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī, this writer had collected more than one hundred *mutawātir* aḥādīth identified by him which prove in an undeniable manner that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was raised alive and that he will return close to the Day of Judgement. This collection in book form and entitled, *Al-Tasrīḥ bimā Tawatarā fī Nuzūl al-Masiḥ* has been recently published from Beirut with marginal notes and commentary by 'Allāma 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah, a revered scholar of Aleppo, Syria.

Ḥāfiẓ ibn Kathīr while explaining the verse *وانه لعلم للساعة* of Sūrah Al-Zukhruf (43:61) has said:

وقد تواترت الاحاديث عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم انه اخبر بنزول عيسى عليه السلام قبل يوم القيامة اماما عادلاً الخ

There are aḥādīth from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, narrated in an uninterrupted succession, that he proclaimed the coming of 'Īsā عليه السلام before the Day of Judgment as a just leader.

At this stage I would like to draw the attention of the reader to a point which, if noticed even with a small measure of sanity and justice,

would leave no room for any doubt regarding this question. The point is that in the eleventh section of Sūrah 'Āl-'Imrān, Allah Almighty while referring to past prophets deemed it sufficient to refer to prophets Ādam, Nūḥ, 'Āl-Ibrāhīm and 'Āl-'Imrān briefly in one single verse. After that, it was in nearly three sections and twenty two verses that reference was made to Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام and his family with meticulous detail - something which has not been made in that manner even in respect of the Last of the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم to whom the Qur'ān was revealed. Note the detailed mention of the grandmother of Jesus, her pledge, the birth of his mother, her name, her upbringing, the conceiving of Jesus by his mother then the detailed narrative of his birth, followed by the description of what his mother ate and drank, after child birth, her return to the family with the newborn child, their blames and curses, first the gift of eloquence to the newborn as his miracle, then his growing up and call to his people, opposition faced and the help of disciples, the hostile attempts by the Jews to trap and kill him, his being raised alive onto the heavens - then complete details of his additional traits, his looks, physique, dress and its likes - these are accounts which have not been taken up in the whole spectrum of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth in respect of any prophet or messenger with that much of detail. This point is an open invitation to everyone to think as to why did this happen and what was the wisdom behind it.

Even a moment's reflection here makes it clear that the Last of the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم, being the final prophet and messenger with no apostle to come after him, took special care to guide his community about conditions that it was going to face right through the Day of Judgement. He therefore, took upon himself to identify those who would be worthy of the community's following. He, as a matter of principle, described them with a profile of their general qualities. There were other blessed people whom he identified by name and emphatically asked the community to follow them. Other than these, he also marked out the astray and the deviating who posed a danger to the faith of the community.

Of the mischief-makers who were to come after the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم the most notorious was Dajjāl (the anti-Christ) the imposter of the Messiah, whose disturbing wickedness was terribly deviation-prone. Therefore, the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم related many de-

tails of his profile, attending conditions and distinguishing traits, so that there remains no room for the community to doubt about his being a mischief monger whenever he appears. Similarly, among the later day religious reformers and power-worthy elders, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام is the most distinguished whom Allah Almighty blessed with the station of prophethood, kept him alive in the heavens to come to the rescue of the Muslim community during the wicked period of Dajjāl (anti-Christ) and appointed him to kill Dajjāl close to the Day of Judgement. This is why it was deemed necessary that the community should be given the most clear indications of his person and qualities as well, so that no human being remains in doubt while identifying Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام when he comes, the second time.

There are many elements of wisdom in this treatment.

Firstly, should the community find it difficult to identify 'Īsā (Jesus Christ) عليه السلام, the very purpose of his coming will be negated. If the Muslim community will not identify and cooperate with him, how could he help and support them? Secondary, although Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will not come into the world at that time designated as Prophet, but he would come to lead the Muslim community as the *Khalifa* (viceregent) the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, the personal station of prophethood that he has will not be taken from him. Instead, he would be like the governor of a province or state who continues to hold that position even if he has gone out to visit some other province or state for some reason. Therefore, even though he is not as a governor in that province, the office of the governorship has not been *ipso facto* taken away from him. Similarly, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will not be without his attribute of prophethood at that time, and the way the rejection of his prophethood was infidelity earlier, so infidelity it shall be at that time. Now the Muslim community which has already nursed and shown its faith in his prophethood as based on the guidance of the Qur'an would fall into the grievous error of rejection, if it fails to recognize him when he comes. So, clarifying his signs and attributes in a greater measure was extremely necessary.

Thirdly, since the event of the coming of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will take place towards the later years of this mortal world, chances were given the ambiguity in his marks of identification that some other per-

son could come up with the claim of being Messiah, the son of Mary, in which case, these indicators will serve well to refute and reject any such claim. This is what happened in pre-partition India where Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian claimed that he was the promised Messiah. The scholars of the Muslim community refuted his claim on the basis of these very cited indicators.

In short, here and at other places, the very fact of such detailed description concerning Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام is in itself indicating that his reappearance is due close to the Day of Judgement and that he would return to the world. This humble writer has taken up this subject in full details in his Urdu treatise entitled Masīh Mawūd kī pah-chān (Identifying the Promised Messiah) which may be consulted for these details.

Verses 56 - 58

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَأَعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ
وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا
الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾
ذَلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٥٨﴾

Now, as for those who disbelieve, I shall punish them, a severe punishment, in this world and in the Hereafter; and for them there are no helpers. [56]

And as for those who believe and do good deeds, He (Allah) will give them their rewards in full. And Allah does not like transgressors. [57]

This We recite to you of the Verses and the Message that is full of wisdom. [58]

Sequence

In the previous verse (56), it was said that Allah will be the final judge and decision-maker in what they used to differ in between themselves. This verse describes that decision.

Commentary

Are the sufferings of this world beneficial for the next life?

The words "I shall punish them in this world and in the Hereafter"

in verse 56 may create a little doubt. Since the statement here relates to the judgement to be pronounced on the Last Day, how can the statement -'I shall punish them in this world and in the hereafter'- be explained -as this world of ours would not exist at that time and even though it exists today, but the judgement is to be given on the Day of Resurrection?

This difficulty can be resolved by turning to an analogy. This saying is similar to the saying of a judge to a culprit -'Right now I am sending you to the jail for a year; if you misbehave there, I shall make it for two years'- which simply means that those two years will be counted from the day the punishment is being awarded. Based on this, it is certain that following any misbehaviour the two-year punishment will become effective. So, given the misconduct, the validity of this whole will regulate itself for one more year as 'add-on'.

The same applies here as the punishment in the world has already been given; now the punishment of the Hereafter will be added on and the sum-total will be finally executed on the Last Day, that is, having been punished in the world will not serve as expiation for the punishment of the Hereafter. This is contrary to the condition of believers who, when struck by suffering in the mortal world, have their sins forgiven and find the punishment due in the Hereafter lightened or ward off. For this reason, a hint to this effect has been made in لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ (and Allah does not like transgressors -v. 57), that is, believers are dear because of their belief and the beloved ones are always treated in such a manner. The disbelievers are detested because of their disbelief and those detested do not receive such treatment. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

Verses 59 - 63

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ
لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٥٩﴾ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ
الْمُتَرَبِّينَ ﴿٦٠﴾ فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ
فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ
وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ تَبَتُّهُلُمْ فَانْجَعَلُ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ

الْكٰذِبِيْنَ ﴿٦١﴾ اِنَّ هٰذَا لَهٗوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ وَمَا مِنْ اِلٰهٍ اِلَّا
 اللّٰهُ وَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَهٗوَ الْعَزِيْزُ الْحَكِيْمُ ﴿٦٢﴾ فَاِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ
 عَلِيْمٌ بِالْمُفْسِدِيْنَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Surely, the case of 'Isā, in the sight of Allah, is like the case of 'Ādam. He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be", and he came to be. [59] The truth is from your Lord. So, do not be of those who doubt. [60]

So, if someone argues with you in this after what has come to you of the knowledge, say, "Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then pray and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars." [61]

This is, indeed, the true narration. And there exists no god but Allah. And Allah is surely the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. [62]

So, should they turn back, Allah is all-aware of the mischievous. [63]

The event of *Mubāhala* and the refutation of heretics.

The background of these verses is that the Holy Prophet ﷺ sent an ultimatum to the Christians of Najrān which included three options in the order given below:

1. Accept Islām, or
2. Pay *jizya* (a levy on free non-Muslims under Muslim rule), or
3. Get ready for a war.

After mutual consultation, the Christians sent a delegation to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم consisting of Shuraḥbīl 'Abdullāh b. Shuraḥbīl and Jabbār ibn Fayḍ to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. They came and began their talks on religious issues. When they, in their effort to prove the godhood of Jesus, took their debate to the extremes of dispute, that was the moment this verse of *Mubāhala* was revealed. Thereupon, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم invited the Christians to join in the *Mubāhala* confrontation (a form of resolving disputes by praying to Allah, the details of which shall shortly be discussed) and quite readily, he himself came out with Sayyidah Fāṭimah رضى الله عنها ,

Sayyidnā 'Alī رضی الله عنه and their sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusain رضی الله عنهما along with him all set for the *Mubāhalah*. Looking at this, Shuraḥbīl said to his two comrades: 'Look, you already know that he is a prophet of Allah and getting into a *Mubāhalah* confrontation with a prophet means certain death and destruction for us. So find out some other way to get out of this fix.' His comrades asked him as to what he thought it could be. Shuraḥbīl said: 'I think the best solution is to opt for a truce as advised by the prophet'. So, on this everybody agreed. As a result, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made peace by fixing a levy on them which was accepted by them as well. (Tafsīr ibn Kathīr, v. 1).

The Meaning of *Mubāhalah*

As stated earlier, verse 61 has instructed the Holy Prophet ﷺ to invite his opponents (Christians) to *Mubāhalah* which literally means 'mutual prayer' but in the terminology of Islāmīc Shari'ah it refers to a particular form of resolving religious disputes. When the argumentations from both sides fail to resolve a religious issue, the parties jointly pray Allah to cast His curse on whichever of the two parties is false. Since curse means 'moving someone far away from the divine mercy', - and moving far away from mercy is being close to divine wrath--therefore, the essence of the meaning is: Wrath be on the liar. As such, whoever is the liar shall face the evil consequences whereupon the truth will become evident before the disbelievers as well. Invocation in this manner is called '*Mubāhalah*'.

Originally, the *Mubāhalah* can be carried out by the disputants only; they can simply get together and pray. It is not necessary that all their family members are assembled. However, if all the family members participate in the *Mubāhalah*, it becomes more effective. (That is why the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was instructed to invite the family members of both sides).

'Son' includes grandson

In verse 61 the words 'our sons' does not mean 'our' sons as of the loins only. Instead, the sense is general. They may be sons or grandsons, because this is how the word is used in common usage. Therefore, the grandsons of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, namely Sayyidnā Ḥasan and Sayyidnā Ḥusain رضی الله عنهما, as well as Sayyidnā 'Alī رضی الله عنه the son-in-law of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم

are all included in the words: 'our sons'.

Sayyidnā 'Alī رضی اللہ عنہ has another additional reason for being included in the 'sons' of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, because he had grown up under the patronage of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم who had treated him like his own son.

It is, therefore, evident that Sayyidnā 'Alī رضی اللہ عنہ is included in the words: 'our sons'. Some *Shī'ites* have claimed that since he was not the son of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم he could not be referred to by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as 'our son'. Through this notion the *Shī'ites* conclude that Sayyidnā 'Alī رضی اللہ عنہ was included in the words 'ourselves', therefore, he was the immediate successor of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

The fallacy of this argument is evident from what has been discussed above.

Verse 64

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ
الَّا تَعْبُدُ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكُ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا
أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا
مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Say, "O people of the Book, come to a word common between us and you that we worship none but Allah, that we associate nothing with Him and that some of us do not take some others as lords instead of Allah." Then, should they turn back, say, "You be witness that we are Muslims."^[64]

Commentary:

Important Principles of *Tabligh* and *Da'wah*:

This verse: قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ unfolds an important principle of *Tabligh* (Preaching) and *Da'wah* (Preaching Islām). The principle requires that a person, who desires to carry his call to a group which holds beliefs and ideas different from his own, should follow a particular method. That method is to induce that group to unite only on what they both can agree to, for instance, when the Holy Prophet ﷺ gave

the Byzantine ruler, Hiraql (Heraclius) the call to Islām, he picked up a particular point on which there was mutual agreement, i.e., on the Oneness of Allah Almighty. That invitation is reproduced below:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ، مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى هِرَقْلٍ عَظِيمِ
الرُّومِ، سَلَامٌ عَلَيَّ مِنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَى، أَمَا بَعْدَ فَاذْعُوهُ بِدَعَايَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ
أَسْلَمَ تَسْلَمُ يُوْتِكُ اللَّهُ أَجْرَكَ مَرَّتَيْنِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتَ فَإِنْ عَلَيَّ أَثْمُ الْبَرِيصِينَ،
يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكَمْ إِلَّا نَعْبُدُ إِلَّا اللَّهَ
وَلَا نُشْرِكُ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ (البخارى)

I begin with the name of Allah who is All-Merciful, Very-Merciful. From Muḥammad, servant of Allah, and His messenger: To Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor. Peace be on him who takes the right path. After that, I invite you to the call of Islām. Embrace Islām and be in peace. Allah will bestow upon you a twofold reward, but should you turn away, then, on you shall be the sin of your subjects. "O people of the Book, come to a word common between us and you that we worship none but Allah, that we associate nothing with Him and that some of us do not take some others as Lord instead of Allah." (Al-Bukhārī)

The statement, 'you be witness...' in the last sentence of the verse teaches us a lesson, that is, should someone refuse to accept the truth, even after it has been proved clearly, then the proper course is to restate one's own belief and conclude the conversation. Entering into further debate and verbal altercation is not appropriate.

Verses 65 - 68

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنزِلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ
وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنَ بَعْدِهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ هَآئِنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ
حَاجِبْتُمْ فِيمَا لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِيمَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ
عِلْمٌ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ
الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾ إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا

النَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

O people of the Book, why do you argue about Ibrāhīm while the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed until after him? Have you, then, no sense? [65]

Look, this is what you are - you argued about what you had knowledge; why then do you argue about what you have no knowledge? And Allah knows and you do not know. [66]

Ibrāhīm was not a Jew, nor a Christian. But he was upright, a Muslim, and was not one of those who associate partners with Allah. [67]

The closest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed him, and this prophet, and those who believe. And Allah is guardian of the believers. [68]

Commentary

The argumentation referred to in verse 65 was to decide whether Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام followed the way of the Jews, or that of the Christians. The futility of their exercise already stood exposed as both these ways in religion appeared long after the revelation of the Old and New Testaments. These just did not exist before that. How, then, could it be claimed that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام adhered to these ways?

Verse 66 points out to the hollowness of their approach when they indulged in their argumentation on the basis of incomplete knowledge. That they would venture to do so on the basis of no knowledge could hardly be explained. The truth is that only Allah knows the way of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام .

That way has been described in Verse 67.

Verse 68 declares that the closest of people to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm were those who followed him during his time and now the closest to him is the Prophet of Islām, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa صلى الله عليه وسلم and so are the believers in him and in past prophets. These believers are the community of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and their guardian is Allah and He will reward them for their belief.

Verses 69 - 71

وَدَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يُضِلُّوكُمْ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا
 أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ
 اللَّهِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَلْبِسُونَ الْحَقَّ
 بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

A group from the people of the Book loves to mislead you, while they mislead none but themselves and they do not realise. [69]

O people of the Book, why do you disbelieve in the signs of Allah while you are yourselves a witness? [70]

O People of the Book, why do you confound the truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth when you know?

[71]

Commentary

Verse 69 exposes the cherished desire of the people of the Book to mislead Muslims away from the true faith they are on. The text, then, firmly declares that the victim of their effort to misguide is no one other than themselves, something they do not realize.

Verse 70, addressing the people of the Book, asks them as to why they disbelieve in the signs of Allah, such as the verses in Torah and Injil which prove the prophethood of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم because the denial of his prophethood amounts to declaring these verses to be false which is infidelity, although they themselves confirm these as true. This is an admonition on their error in belief.

Proceeding further, Verse 71 admonishes them for confusing the real statement, that is, the prophecy about the prophethood of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم with the fictitious, that is, the interpolated statements or false exegesis. The crucial question being asked is as to why would they conceal the truth of the matter despite knowing the truth, and knowing that they are hiding it.

The words in *أَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ* (you are yourselves a witness - 70) and in *أَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ* (you know - 71) should not be taken to mean that disbelief will become permissible for them if they do not attest to the truth or have no

knowledge about it. This is because *kufr* (disbelief) is intrinsically an abominable thing to practice. This is prohibited under all conditions. However, the mention of *kufr* (disbelief) after knowledge and attestation is to increase the impact of reproachment.

Verses 72 - 74

وَقَالَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ عَلَيَّ الدِّينِ
 آمَنُوا وَجَهَ النَّهَارِ وَكَفَرُوا آخِرَهُ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾
 وَلَا تَتُومِنُوا إِلَّا لِمَنْ تَبَعَ دِينَكُمْ قُلْ إِنْ الْهُدَىٰ هُدَىٰ اللَّهِ أَنْ
 يُؤْتَىٰ أَحَدٌ مِّثْلَ مَا أُوتِيتُمْ أَوْ يُحَاجُّوكُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ قُلْ إِنْ
 الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾
 يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾

And a group from the people of the Book said, "Believe in what has been revealed to the believers in the early part of the day, and disbelieve at the end of it, so that they may turn back. [72] And do not believe except in those who follow your faith." Say, "(Real) guidance is the guidance of Allah." (But all that you do is due to your envy) that someone is given what is similar to that which you have been given, or that they argue against you before your Lord. Say, "The bounty is in the hands of Allah. He gives it to whom He wills. And Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing. [73] He chooses for His grace whom He wills. And Allah is the Lord of great bounty." [74]

Some from among the people of the Book chose a strategy of deception in order to mislead Muslims. According to their agreed plan, they would declare their belief in the Qur'an in the morning and then reject it in the evening. They thought that this quick about-turn would create doubts in the minds of Muslims about Qur'an and Islām and they might turn away from their faith thinking that there must be something wrong with Islām visible to such learned people who were open-minded enough to accept it first. They also made it a point to reserve their feinted declaration of belief in Islām to hoodwink Muslims only! Their true belief, they planned, would be affirmed before none

but only those who follow their own creed. The rule was: Sincerity with the later, expediency with the former!

That these tricks are low is proved later in Verse 73 when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been asked to declare that their clever moves are not going to work for them since Guidance given to servants of Allah is certainly from Allah. So, it is He who, with Guidance in His control, can make whoever He will steadfast on that Guidance. No one can succeed in weaning such a person away from it with any trick, plan or enticement whatsoever.

The reason why they act in the way they do is envy, that is, they envy Muslims as to why they were given the Scripture, or they envy their supremacy in religious argument. It is because of this envy that they keep working to bring about the downfall of Islām and of the community that adheres to it.

That this envy is based on not knowing the nature, timing and wisdom of Allah's grace and mercy is explained in the later part of verse 73 and in verse 74.

Verse 75

وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ
مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِدِينَارٍ لَأَيُّدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ
عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكُذْبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

And among the people of the Book there is one who, if you entrust him with a heap (of gold or silver), will give it back to you; and among them there is one who, if you entrust him with a single *dinār*, he will not give it back to you unless you keep standing over him. This is because they have said, "There is no way we can be blamed in the matter of the unlettered." And they tell lies about Allah knowingly. [75]

Sequence

In the previous verses (70-72), breach of faith committed by the people of the Book was mentioned. This included disbelieving in the

verses of Allah, confusing the truth with what is false, concealing the truth and conspiring to mislead Muslim believers.

In the verse cited above (75), their breach of trust in matters of property has been mentioned. Since some of them happened to be trustworthy, both types were identified.

Commentary

Praising good qualities in some non-Muslim is correct

In this verse (75), some people have been praised for their trustworthiness. If this 'some' refers to those among the people of the Book who had embraced Islām, praising them poses no problems. But, in case, it does not refer to Muslims particularly and instead, refers to the people of the Book in the absolute sense including non-Muslims as well, then the situation generates the question: When no act of a *kāfir* (disbeliever) is acceptable why praise them?

The answer is that for an action or deed to become acceptable is a different matter and having a word of praise for it is something else. From praising something it does not follow that it is acceptable with Allah. The purpose is to point out that something good, even if it be that of a *kāfir* (disbeliever), is good enough in a certain degree, the benefit of which he receives in the form of good reputation in the mortal world, and of course, in the Hereafter, in the form of a reduction in punishment for his disbelief.

This statement also makes it clear that Islām does not resort to prejudice and short-sightedness. On the contrary, it shows open-hearted appreciation of the excellence of even its adversary in respect of his achievements.

It is from this verse: *إِلَّا مَا دُمَّتْ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا* (unless you keep standing over him - 75) that Imām Abū Ḥanīfah has deduced the ruling that the lender has the right to keep pursuing the borrower until he receives his due. (Qurtubī, v. 4)

Verses 76 - 77

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِعَهْدِهِ وَاتَّقَىٰ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾ إِنَّ
الَّذِينَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ وَأَيْمَانِهِمْ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ لَا خَلَاقَ

لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

Why not? Whoever fulfils his pledge and fears Allah, then, Allah loves the God-fearing. [76] Surely, those who take a small price out of the covenant of Allah and out of their oaths, for them there is no share in the Hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them, nor will He look towards them on the Day of Doom, nor will He purify them. And for them there is a painful punishment. [77]

Sequence

Earlier, in *يَتُوبُونَ* (they say - 75), there was a refutation of the claim made by the people of the Book. Onwards from there, in verses 76-77, the same refutation has been re-asserted and the merit of fulfilling a commitment as well as the condemnation for its breach have been clarified.

Commentary

'*Ahd* (pledge or covenant) is what gets settled between parties concerned after mutual discussions and by which both of them have to abide. Contrary to this is *وعدده* : *wa'dah* or promise which issues forth from a single side, that is, '*ahd* (pledge or covenant) is bilateral while *wa'dah* (promise) is unilateral.

That commitments should be fulfilled has been stressed in the Qur'an and Sunnah time and again. For instance, right here in verse 77 cited above, five warnings have been given to those who break their solemn pledge:

1. They will have no share in the blessings of the heaven. In a *hadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that one who usurps the right of a Muslim under false oath makes the fire of Hell compulsory for himself. The narrator of the *hadīth* asked if the Fire will become compulsory even if this concerned something very insignificant? In reply, he said: Even if this be the green bough of a tree. (Muslim vide *Mazharī*)

2. Allah Almighty will not speak to them with glad tidings.

3. Allah Almighty will not look at them mercifully on the Day of Doom.

4. Allah Almighty will not forgive them their sins since they wasted away the rights of a servant of Allah through breach of trust, and Allah will not forgive what a human being owes to another human being. In Islāmic terminology, this is known as the *ḥaqq al-'abd* or the right of a servant of Allah.

5. And a grievous punishment shall await them.

Verses 78 - 80

وَأِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا يَلُونِ السِّنْتَهِمْ بِالْكِتَابِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ
الْكِتَابِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَمَا
هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكُذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ
﴿٧٨﴾ مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ اللَّهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنُّبُوَّةَ ثُمَّ
يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ
كُونُوا رَاسِدِينَ ۚ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ
﴿٧٩﴾ وَلَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَتَّخِذُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ أَرْبَابًا
أَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْكَفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

And among them there is indeed a group who twist their tongues in (reading) the Book, so that you may deem it to be from the Book, while it is not from the Book. And they say, "It is from Allah", while it is not from Allah. And they tell lies about Allah knowingly.

[78]

It is not (possible) for a man that Allah gives him the Book, the wisdom and the prophethood, then he starts saying to the people "Be my worshippers aside from Allah" rather, (he would say), "Be men of the Lord; as you have been teaching the Book, and as you have been learning it." [79]

Nor is it (possible for him) that he bids you to hold the angels and the prophets as Lords. Shall he bid you to disbelief, after your having become Muslims? [80]

Commentary

It was during the presence of the deputation from Najrān that

some Jews and Christians had said: 'O Muḥammad, do you want us to worship you the way Christians worship Jesus, son of Mary?' He said: 'I seek refuge with Allah that we worship someone other than Allah or call on others to do so. Allah Almighty has not sent us to do that.' Thereupon, this verse was revealed.

The infallibility of the Prophets

The verse implies that a person whom Allah invests with the Book, the Wisdom and the power of making decisions, and places him on the great station of prophethood is always faithful to his mission when he communicates the Divine message to people and calls on them to become His faithful servants. That he starts moving people away from the worship of only one God and starts asking them to become his own worshippers or the worshippers of some other creatures is something he can never do. If so, this would mean that the one whom Allah had sent as his messenger did not, in fact, deserve this designation. Any government of this world, when appointing someone to an office of responsibility, always takes two factors into consideration:

1. Does the incumbent have the ability to comprehend and execute government policy?

2. How far can he be expected to execute government directives, and to hold its subjects in a stable stance of loyalty? No king or parliament would ever appoint someone as its representative or ambassador about whom there exists the least doubt of indulging in anti-government activity, or deviation from its policy or directives. However, it is possible that the government may have failed to make a correct assessment of a person's ability or loyalty. But with Allah even that element of doubt does not exist. If He knows about a man that he would not over-step the bounds of loyalty and obedience to Him, even in the slightest degree, then it is impossible that he could, later on, prove to be contrary to that assessment. Otherwise, it would mean that Divine knowledge is defective (we seek refuge with Allah!) Right from here, the question of the *'iṣmah*¹ (infallibility) of the prophets, عليهم السلام, becomes clear. Now that the blessed prophets are free of mi-

1. *'Iṣmah* means a special protection given to someone by Allah which makes him refrain from sins. For the purpose of brevity we may translate it as 'infallibility' - editor.

nor sins, how can the probability of doing *shirk* (the major sin of associating others with Allah) or making revolt against Allah remain valid?

In this, there is the necessary refutation of the Christians who claimed that it was Masīḥ عليه السلام who asked them to have belief in his sonship and godhead. Also chastised were the Muslims who had gone to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم trying to find out if it was all right for them to prostrate before him rather than greet him with the usual *salām*. Also admonished were the people of the Book who had invested their rabbis and monks with the station of God. Refuge with Allah! (Tafsīr 'Usmānī)

Verses 81 - 84

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِ وَلَتَنْصُرُنَّهُ قَالَ أَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكُمْ إِصْرِي قَالُوا أَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ فَاشْهَدُوا وَأَنَا مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾ فَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾ أَفَغَيَّرَ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾ قُلْ أَمَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

And when Allah made the prophets take pledge: (saying) "If I give you a book and wisdom, then comes to you a messenger verifying what is with you, you shall have to believe in him and you shall have to support him." He said, "Do you affirm and accept my covenant in this respect?" They said, "We affirm." He said, "Then, bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses." [81]

Then those who turn back after this they are the sin-

ful.[82]

Are they, then, seeking a faith other than that of Allah while to Him alone submits whosoever there is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwilling, and to Him they shall be returned? [83]

Say, "We believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to us and in what was revealed to Ibrāhīm, Ismā'īl, Ishāq, Ya'qūb and the descendants, and in what has been given to Mūsā, 'Isā (Jesus) and the prophets, from their Lord: We do not differentiate between any of them. And to Him we submit ourselves." [84]

Commentary

Three Covenants with Allah Almighty

There are three kinds of pledges Allah Almighty has taken from His servants:

1. One of them has been mentioned in Sūrah al-A'rāf (الاعراف) under *ألسنت بربكم* : *alastu bi rabbikum* (Am I not your Lord? - 7:172) The purpose of this pledge was to bring round the whole human community to believe in the being of God and in His universal Lordship since the whole edifice of religion rests on this very corner-stone. Unless this belief is there, the lead given by reason and reflection can be of no positive use in the field of religion. Additional details on this subject will, *inshallah*, appear where due.

2. The second pledge is mentioned in verse 187 of the present Sūrah in the following words:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُ

And when Allah took pledge from those who were given the Book: "You shall make it known to people, and you shall not conceal it." (3:18)

This pledge was taken exclusively from the 'ulamā' (religious scholars) of the people of the Book asking them not to hide the truth but to state it clearly and openly.

3. The third pledge has been described in the present verse:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْكُمْ أَنْ قُولُوا هِيَ حَكْمَةٌ

And when Allah made the prophets take pledge: (saying) "If I

give you a book and wisdom... (3:81)

The purpose and place of the pledge

To answer as to where did this third pledge take place, it can be said that it either took place in the spiritual world on a metaphysical plane or in our physical world by means of revelation. Both are probable. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

As for the meaning of *Mithāq* (pledge) the Holy Qur'an has itself mentioned its contents. However, with regard to the relevant subject of this pledge, sayings differ. Sayyidnā 'Alī and Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما say that this was about the Last Prophet, صلى الله عليه وسلم. It means that Allah Almighty had taken this pledge from all prophets solely in respect of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. The pledge was that they should, if they appear in his blessed time, believe in him, give him help and support, and leave behind instructions for their respective communities to do the same.

Ta'wūs, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatādah (رحمهم الله) say that this pledge was taken from the prophets so that they help and support each other mutually. (Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr)

This later statement can also be substantiated from what Allah Almighty has said in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb:

وَأَذُّوا أَخْدَانًا مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِيثَاقَهُمْ وَمِنْكَ وَمِنْ نُوحٍ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ
ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَأَخْدْنَا مِنْهُمْ مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا (الأحزاب)

And when We took from the prophets their pledge, and from you, and from Nuḥ and Ibrāhīm and Mūsā and 'Isā son of Maryam - and We took from them a firm pledge. (33:7)

This is because the pledge was taken in order that they support and attest each other. (Tafsīr Aḥmadī)

In reality, there is no contradiction in the two explanations cited above, therefore, both can be brought to bear on the meaning. (Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr)

There may be a doubt here. One may say that Allah Almighty is All-Knowing and All-Aware. He certainly knows that Muḥammad ﷺ will not be appearing in this world during the presence of any prophet. If so, asking prophets to believe in him seems to be of no use. But, a

little deliberation would bring its usefulness into clear focus. One will realize that the moment they declare a firm intention to believe, as commanded by Allah Almighty, in the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم, the paradigm of most sublime attributes, it will be right from that point of time that they will become entitled to Divine blessings. (Sawī vide Jalālayn)

The final and universal prophethood

In verse 81 beginning with the words: **وَأِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ** (And when Allah made the prophets take pledge:), it has been clearly stated that Allah Almighty took a firm pledge from all prophets, which was: When, during your lifetime there comes another prophet - who will certainly reaffirm the message of past prophets and their books - then, it is necessary for the prophet who is present at that time that he not only believes personally in the veracity and prophethood of the new prophet but also instructs others to do so. From this absolute rule set by the Qur'an, it becomes very clear that Allah Almighty must have taken a pledge from the prophets about Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ as well, quite similar to what 'Allāmah al-Subkī has stated in his treatise entitled **التعظيم والمثبة في التوكل به ولتصرفه**. He says: 'In this verse, the word, *rasūl* (messenger) refers to Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم; and there has never been a prophet from whom Allah Almighty had not taken the pledge to believe in his prophethood and provide help and support to him; and there has not been one single prophet who did not bequeath to his community the legacy of believing in and helping and supporting him; and, if the noble prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had appeared during the times of the prophets, it is he who would have been the prophet to (be obeyed by) all of them, and all of them would have been part of his community.'

This tells us that his status is not restricted to his being simply the prophet of his community; he is the prophet of prophets as well. So, he himself says in a hadīth: 'If Mūsā (Moses) was living today, he too would have had no option but to follow me.'

At yet another occasion, he said: 'When 'Īsā عليه السلام (Jesus) will come, he too will act in accordance with the noble Qur'an and the rules set forth by your prophet'. (Tafsīr ibn Kathīr)

Thus, from here we learn that his prophethood is 'universal and in-

clusive' and that all previous religious codes stand absorbed in his Shari'ah. What is being said here also brings into a bright focus the correct meaning of his saying: *بُعِثْتُ إِلَى النَّاسِ كَافَّةً* (I have been sent to all human beings). It shows that taking this hadīth to mean that his prophethood extends from his time to the Day of Judgement is not correct. Instead, the time duration of his prophethood is so extensive that it begins before the prophethood of Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام as the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has himself said in a hadīth: *كنت نبيا و آدم بين الروح والجسد* (I was a prophet even when Ādam was in a state between spirit and body). That he will be the first to step forward for intercession on the Day of Resurrection, and that the entire progeny of Ādam عليه السلام will assemble under his flag and that he led the prayers at a congregation of all prophets in Bayt al-Maqdis on the Night of Ascenst (*Mirāj*) are all signs of this leadership which is great and universal.

Verse 85

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

And whoever seeks a faith other than Islām, it will never be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, is among the losers. [85]

Commentary

The literal meaning of 'Islām' is 'submission and obedience.' As a term 'Islām' stands for submission to that particular religion which Allah Almighty has sent through his prophets to guide human beings, because fundamental principles are the same in the religious codes of all prophets عليهم السلام .

Correspondingly, there are occasions when 'Islām' is used in that general sense, while there are other occasions when it is used exclusively to identify the Last Shari'ah which was revealed to the Last of the Prophets عليهم السلام . Both these kinds of application are present in the Holy Qur'an. That the past prophets called themselves 'Muslim' and their communities, the 'Muslim' community, stands proved under the authority of several wordings of the Qur'anic text. Concurrently, this name has also been used as a particular name of the community the Last of the Prophets:

هُوَ سَمَّاكُمْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا

It was He who named you Muslims before, and in this (Qur'an). (22:78)

In short, every Divine religion which came through a prophet is also called 'Islām'. Then, it is also used as a particular title for the Muslim community. Now, the question is as to which sense does the word, 'Islām', carry at this place in the Holy Qur'an?

The correct position is that, no matter which of the two meanings is taken, it does not make much of a difference in terms of the outcome, since the name of 'Islām' given to the religion of past prophets was for a limited group of people and a specified period of time.

That was the 'Islām' of that time. Restricted to the specific group or community, that 'Islām' was not meant to serve as a universal code for all times to come. As such when a particular prophet departed and was replaced by another prophet, 'Islām' (i.e. the specific code) of that time ceased to be operative. The 'Islām' of the said time was to be what the new prophet presented. Obviously, there was no difference between these different codes in so far as the fundamentals are concerned, however, the subsidiary injunctions might differ. As for the 'Islām' given through the last Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it will remain un-abrogable and will serve as a permanent code right upto the Day of Judgment. And, in accordance with the cited rule, all previous religions stand abrogated after the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been sent.

Now, they are not Islām as such anymore. Instead, Islām is the name of that particular religion which has reached us through the Holy Prophet, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم. Therefore, it appears in authentic *aḥādīth* that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'Had Mūsā been living this day, following me would have been incumbent upon him too.' In yet another *ḥadīth*, he has been reported to have said that 'Īsā, when he appears close to the Day of Resurrection, he too, inspite of holding his distinction and office of prophethood, would follow no other religious code except that of his (the Prophet of Islām).

Therefore, at this place, no matter what sense is taken of Islām - the general or the particular - the outcome of both is the same, that is,

after the coming of the Last of the Prophets, عليهم السلام, only that religion, and that alone, will be termed as Islām which has come to the world through him. On belief in that alone depends the salvation (*najāt*) of all human beings for it is their indispensable need. This explains what has been said in the present verse: 'Whoever seeks a faith other than Islām, it will never be accepted from him.'

Details about this subject have already appeared under the commentary on the verse (3:19).

Verses 86 - 91

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ
الرَّسُولَ حَقٌّ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ
﴿٨٦﴾ أُولَئِكَ جزَاءُ هُمْ أَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةَ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَكِةِ وَالنَّاسِ
أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ
يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٨٩﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ثُمَّ
ازْدَادُوا كُفْرًا لَنْ تُقْبَلَ تَوْبَتُهُمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الضَّالُّونَ ﴿٩٠﴾ إِنَّ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمْ مِلءُ
الْأَرْضِ ذَهَبًا وَلَوْ افْتَدَى بِهِ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ وَمَأْتِهِمْ
مِنْ نُصْرِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

How shall Allah give guidance to a people who disbelieved after they had accepted Faith and testified that the Prophet is true and the clear signs had come to them? And Allah does not give guidance to the unjust people.[86] The punishment of such people is that upon them is the curse of Allah, and of the angels and of the human beings altogether. [87]

They remain under it forever. Neither will the punishment be lightened for them, nor will they be given respite, [88] except those who repent afterwards and mend their ways; then, Allah is All-Forgiving, Very-

Merciful.[89]

Those who disbelieve after having accepted Faith and then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall never be accepted. And they are the ones who have lost the right path. [90]

Those who disbelieve and die as disbelievers, even an Earth-full of gold shall never be accepted from any of them, even if one were to offer it as ransom. They are the ones for whom there is a painful punishment, and for them there are no helpers. [91]

Commentary

The removal of a doubt:

On a superficial view of the verse كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ : 'How shall Allah give guidance...' (86), there emerges a doubt that whoever turns an apostate receives no guidance afterwards, although, the fact is contrary to this. There are many who, after having become apostates, re-embrace the faith and become recipients of guidance.

The answer is that the withholding of guidance mentioned here is in accordance with common usage. For instance, some criminal when punished by a certain ruler may say, 'I have been given a special treatment by the ruler with his own hands.' And in answer to him, it is said: 'Why are we going to give a special treatment to such a criminal?' That is, there is just no special treatment called for in this case, while it does not mean that such a person cannot, in any way, become deserving of special treatment even if he behaved well. (Bayān al-Qur'an)

Verse 92

لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٢﴾

You shall never attain righteousness unless you spend from what you love. And whatsoever you spend, Allah is fully aware of it. [92]

Sequence of Verses

In the previous verse (91), it was said that charity from disbelievers and deniers was not acceptable with Allah. In this verse, believers have been told about acceptable charity and the etiquette governing it.

Commentary

Let us first understand what *birr* means and what it really signifies so that the whole sense of the verse becomes clear in our minds.

The literal and real meaning of the word *birr* is the perfect fulfillment of someone's rights. It is also used in the sense of charity, performance of good deeds and nice conduct. The word *barr* and *بار* : *bārr* is used for a person who fulfills, fully and totally, all rights due on him. The expression *بِرًّا بِوَالِدَيْهِ* (good to my mother - 19:32) and *بِرًّا بِوَالِدَيْهِ* (good to his father and mother - 19:14) has been used in the Qur'an in this very sense. It has been used there as a personal attribute of prophets who fulfilled the rights of their parents fully and perfectly.

The plural form of this very word *birr* is *abrār* : *abrār* which has been used frequently in the Qur'an. It has been said:

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا

Surely the righteous shall drink of a cup the mixture of which is camphor - 76:5.

Again at another place it is said:

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يُنظَرُونَ

Surely the righteous shall be in bliss, upon furnished thrones gazing - 83:22,23.

yet again there is:

وَأِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ

And surely, the sinners shall be in hell ablaze - 82:14.

The last verse above also tells us that the antonym of *birr* is *fujūr* : *fujūr* (disobedience, sinfulness).

In *al-Ādab al-Mufrad* of Imām al-Bukhārī and in Ibn Mājah and the *Musnad* of Aḥmad, it has been reported from Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'Stick to speaking the truth because truth is a companion of *birr* : *birr* (righteousness) and both these are in Paradise; and abstain from lying because that is a companion of *fujūr* (sin) and both these are in Hell.'

The verse 177 of Sūrah al-Baqarah (2) says:

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteousness is that one believes in Allah and the last Day... 2:177.

After giving a list of good deeds in this verse, all of them have been classed as *birr* (righteousness). The subject verse also tells us that, of the wide range of righteous deeds, the most preferred form of righteousness is to spend the most cherished things in the way of Allah. The verse further tells us 'you can never claim to have righteousness unless you spend out of what you hold dear.' Thus the meaning is that the perfect fulfillment of the the rights of Allah Almighty and a total self-unburdening from it cannot come to pass unless we spend in the way of Allah what we hold dear to our hearts. This very perfect fulfillment of due rights has also been translated as 'perfect good' or 'excellence in doing good' or 'the great merit'. To sum up, the sense here is that entering the ranks of the '*abrār*' (the righteous) depends on sacrificing in the way of Allah that which one holds dear.

The enthusiastic obedience of *Ṣaḥābah*

The noble Companions *رضى الله عنهم اجمعين* who were the first addressees of the Qur'ānic injunctions and the direct disciples of the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* really loved to carry out the injunctions of the Qur'an in letter and spirit. When this verse was revealed, each one of them surveyed as to what they loved most out of what they had. Consequently, requests started coming before the Holy Prophet *ﷺ* that these be spent in the way of Allah. Sayyidnā Abū Ṭalḥah *رضى الله عنه* was the richest person among the *Anṣār* (the helping residents) of Madinah. He was the owner of a fruit farm located right across the mosque of the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم*. It had a well called *Bi'r Hā'*. Now, in place of this farm, there is, in front of Bāb al-Majīdī, a building known as *Istifā Manzil* where pilgrims to Madinah stay. But, in a corner north-east from it, this *Bi'r Hā'* still exists by the same name.¹ The Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* used to visit this farm once in a while and

1. This building and well have now been demolished due to the extension of the Mosque. (Translator)

drink water drawn from *Bi'r Ḥā'*. He liked the water from this well. This farm belonging to Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah was very precious, fertile, and the dearest of all that he owned. After the revelation of this verse, he presented himself before the Holy Prophet ﷺ and said: 'I hold *Bi'r Ḥā'* the dearest of all that I own. I wish to 'spend' it in the way of Allah. I request you to use it for whatever purpose you like.' He said: 'That farm is a high-yield property. I think it is appropriate that you distribute it among your kith and kin.' Sayyidnā Abū Ṭalḥah, accepting the suggestion made by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم distributed it among his relatives and cousins (al-Bukhārī and Muslim). This ḥadīth also tells us that charity is not restricted to spending on the poor and the needy, but it is equally charitable and meritorious to give it to one's own family and relatives.

Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Ḥāritha رضى الله عنه came with a horse and said that he loved it more than anything else he owned and that he wanted to 'spend' it in the way of Allah. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم accepted it. But, after having taken it from him, he gave it to his son Sayyidnā Usāmah رضى الله عنه. Zayd ibn Ḥāritha was somewhat disappointed about that thinking that his charity has found its way back into his own home. But, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم comforted him by saying: 'Allah Almighty has accepted this charity of yours'. (Tafsīr Mazharī vide Ibn Jarīr, and others)

Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه had a bond-maid he liked most. He freed her for the sake of Allah.

Similarly, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar had a bond-maid he loved. He freed her in the name of Allah.

In short, the gist of the verse under reference is that the complete fulfillment of the rights of Allah, the perfect good and excellence in doing good can be achieved only when a person spends something out of his dearest belongings in the way of Allah. Worthy of our attention and retention are some of the following aspects highlighted in this verse:

The word *birr* in this verses is inclusive of all charity, obligatory or voluntary:

1. First of all, this verse motivates spending in the way of Allah.

Some commentators take this to mean obligatory charity such as *zakaḥ* while others take this to be voluntary (*Nafl*: supererogatory) charity. But, according to a consensus of respected researchers in the field, it has been established that its sense is general and includes both obligatory and voluntary charities. Then there are the recorded actions of the noble Companions, as cited above, which bear witness that these charitable initiatives taken by them were voluntary.

Therefore, the sense of the verse is that you give in the way of Allah whatever it may be, the obligatory *zakaḥ* or the voluntary charity, but that perfect excellence and merit will blossom out from them only when you spend in the way of Allah what you like and love. Not that you pick out the spare, the useless or worthless things as if you were trying to get rid of the burden of charity and as if it was some sort of punitive tax on you. This subject has been taken up more clearly in another verse of the Qur'an which is as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّا أَخْرَجْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ
وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوِيَ مِنْهُ تُنْفِقُونَ وَلَكُمْ بِهِ الْأَلْوَانُ تُغْمِضُوا فِيهِ

O those who believe, spend of the the good things you have earned and of what We have brought forth for you from the earth and do not opt for a bad thing spending only from there while you are not going to accept it at all unless you close your eyes to it... - 2:267.

So, the outcome is that picking out the bad and the useless to give in charity is unacceptable; contrary to that is the acceptable charity which earns full merit and which is nothing but what is spent out of one's dear belongings.

Moderation in charity:

2. The second ruling comes out of the hint made in the word *مِمَّا* (from what) in the verse. That is, the purpose is not to spend away everything one likes and loves *en masse* in the way of Allah. Instead, the purpose is to spend whatever has to be spent from the good things. Spending in this way will bring the full reward of charity.

In charity, what counts is sincerity:

3. The third ruling is that spending the cherished is not tied to spending something of high value. Instead, by spending what one likes

and holds dear, no matter how small it may be in quantity or cost, one would still become deserving of this 'birr' or righteousness. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī says, 'Whoever spends sincerely for the good pleasure of Allah, even if that be a single date-fruit alone, that too is good enough to make one deserving of the great merit and perfect righteousness promised in the verse.'

Alternative for those who have nothing to spend:

4. On the outside, it appears from the verse that poor people who do not have much to spend will remain deprived of the great good and righteousness mentioned here. It is because it has been said in the verse that this great good cannot be achieved without spending one's cherished belonging while the poor and the needy just do not have anything through which they could reach the station of righteousness. But, a little deliberation would show that the verse does not mean that those who wish to have the great good and the great merit cannot achieve that by any means other than that of spending out of their cherished possessions. Contrary to that, the fact is that this great good can be achieved by some other means as well, such as, *Tbādah*, *Dhikr*, *Tilāwah* of the Qur'ān and abundance of *nawāfil*. Therefore, the poor and the needy can also become the recipients of this great good through other means as it has been clearly explained in Ḥadīth narrations.

What is meant by things you love?

5. This is the fifth question. Another verse of the Qur'ān tells us that something liked and loved means that the thing is working for him and that he needs it, not that it be spare and useless. The Holy Qur'an says: *رُطُومُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِمْ* and *مُسْكِينًا* which means that "the favoured servants of Allah feed the poor although they need it themselves." (76:08) Similarly, in yet another verse, this subject has been further clarified as follows: *وَيُؤْتُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ* They (the favoured servants of Allah) prefer others over their own selves even though they themselves are in need. (59:09)

Spending the extra and the spare too is not devoid of merit:

6. The sixth ruling given in this verse is that entry into the fold of perfect good, great merit and ranks of the righteous depends on spending one's cherished possessions in the way of Allah. But, it does not

necessarily follow that there is just no merit in store for one who does spend out of what is extra to his needs. On the contrary, as it is said towards the end of the verse: "وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ" that is, 'And whatsoever you spend, Allah is fully aware of it,' the sense of the text in the verse is that while the achievement of the perfect good and entry into the ranks of the righteous, no doubt, depends on spending cherished possessions specially; however, no charity is devoid of merit irrespective of whether one spends the cherished or the extra. But, what is certainly undesirable and prohibited is getting into the habit of always picking out the extra and the bad to spend in the way of Allah. But, a person who not only spends good things he likes in charity but also gives away things which are extra to his needs, e.g., left-over food or used clothing, defective utensils or articles in use, does commit no sin by including these in his acts of charity. He would definitely earn a reward for those too. As far as spending of cherished possessions is concerned, he would thereupon achieve the great good and find his entry into the ranks of the righteous as well.

Also stated in this last sentence of the verse is that Allah is fully aware of the real quality of what man spends and knows whether or not it is dear to him, and if he is spending it for the good pleasure of Allah, or for pretense and publicity. The mere verbal claim by somebody that he is spending what he cherishes in the way of Allah is not enough for this purpose. Keeping vigil over him is the One, the all-Knowing, the all-Aware who is cognizant of the secrets of the heart - He is watching and knows what is the true worth of the spending in His way.

Verses 93 - 95

كُلُّ الطَّعَامِ كَانَ حِلالًا لِّبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِلَّا مَا حَرَّمَ إِسْرَائِيلُ
 عَلَى نَفْسِهِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تُنزَلَ التَّوْرَةُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِالتَّوْرَةِ
 فَاتْلُوهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾ فَمَنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ
 الْكُذْبَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾ قُلْ صَدَقَ
 اللَّهُ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ



Every (kind of) food was lawful for the children of Isrā'īl, except what Isrā'īl had made unlawful for himself well before the Torah was revealed. Say, "Then, bring the Torah and recite it, if you are true." [93]

Then, after all this, those who forge the lie and attribute it to Allah, they are the transgressors. [94]

Say, "Allah has spoken the truth. So, follow the Faith of Ibrāhīm, the upright -- and he was not one of the associators." [95]

Commentary

In the verses appearing above, there is a continuity of arguments against positions taken by the people of the Book. At some places, it concerns Jews and at others, the Christians. One such argument, which has been reported in Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī on the authority of Waḥidī and al-Kalbī, recounts the incident when the Holy Prophet ﷺ stated his adherence to the community of Abraham with reference to all fundamentals of the religious code, and most of the subsidiaries, the Jews objected by saying: 'You eat camel meat and partake of its milk although these were unlawful for Abraham.' The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: 'No, this was lawful for him.' The Jews said: 'All that we consider unlawful has continued to be unlawful since the days of Naoh and Abraham to the point that this unlawfulness reached us.' Thereupon, Allah Almighty revealed the verse: كُلُّ الطَّعَامِ كَانَ حَلَالًا لِّبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ. 'Every (kind of) food was lawful for the children of Isrā'īl - 93' to refute the Jewish claim in which it is said that before the revelation of Torah, all things were lawful for the children of Isrā'īl except the camel meat which Isrā'īl (Jacob) عليه السلام himself had denied to eat for a particular reason, and then it remained unlawful for his progeny also.

The fact, as narrated by Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās in an authentic report, is that Jacob suffered from Sciatica. He had taken a vow that he would abandon what he liked most in what he ate if Allah Almighty cured him of the disease. He was cured and camel meat was what he liked most, so he abandoned it. (See Al-Hākim and al-Tirmidhī as quoted by Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī). Then, it so happened that this prohibition which started because of a vow continued among the Banī Isrā'īl as a divine injunc-