

For you there is no god other than Him. I fear for you the punishment of a great Day). In the first sentence, the invitation given is to worship Allah Ta'ālā, which is the essence of the principle. In the second sentence, people have been persuaded to shun Shirk and Kufr, something which had spread out like some epidemic among these people. In the third sentence, the purpose is to warn people against the danger of that great punishment which they would have to face in the event they were to do otherwise. This 'great punishment' could mean the punishment of the Hereafter, and the punishment of the Flood in the present world too. (Tafsīr Kabīr)

In reply, his people said: *إِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ* ("Indeed we see you in an obvious error"). The word: *مَلَأَ (malā)* is used for chiefs, headmen and empowered elders of a community or group. The sense of what his people said in response to his call was to tell him that he was actually trying to wean them away from their ancestral faith and that all these ideas of rising on some last day and being rewarded or punished were nothing but superstition.

These were harsh words. But, the reply given by Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام carries an eloquent diction fit for a prophet. Here, he is leaving a trail for all carriers of *da'wah*, preachers and reformers, as a signpost of education and guidance. Here, he is not responding on the same wave length, not anger against anger, but trying to remove their doubts in the simplest possible words: *قَالَ يَقَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي ضَلَالَةٌ وَلَا كِبْرٌ رَّسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ*. (He said, "O my people, there is no error in me, but I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. I convey to you the messages of my Lord and wish your betterment, and I know from Allah what you do not know). In other words, what Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام is telling his people was that 'their accusation that he has gone astray was not true. However, the fact remained that he was not bound by their ancestral customs rooted in ignorance like them. Instead of that, he was sent as a messenger from the Lord of all the worlds. Whatever he was telling them was under the guidance of his Lord. His sole mission was to convey the message of Allah Ta'ālā to them which was in their interest and for their good. This was not for any benefit of Allah Ta'ālā nor did it serve any personal interest of his own.' The expression: 'Lord of all the worlds' in this statement strikes

decisively against believing in Shirk by associating others with the pristine Divinity of Allah Ta'ālā. Once the spirit of this assertion is understood, no god or goddess of any denomination can stand valid as objects of worship. After that, he said that the doubts they had about the punishment of the Last Day were because of their lack of awareness - and, as for him, he was blessed with certitude in this matter by Allah Ta'ālā.

After that comes the reply to the other doubt expressed by them. This has been stated clearly in Sūrah Al-Mu'minūn: مَا هَذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتَفَضَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ, that is, the people of Sayyidna Nūḥ came up with another doubt about the call given by him. They thought that he was only human, a man like them who ate, drank, slept and woke as they did. How could they take him as their leader? Had Allah wanted to send a message for them, he should have sent angels with it whose distinction and greatness would have impressed them. Now, what they saw here was no more than that there was someone from among their own race and community who wished to establish his superiority over them - 23:24.

Here, the answer given was: أَوْعَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جَاءَكُمْ ذِكْرًا مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِّنْكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ (Do you wonder that an advice from your Lord has come to you through a man from among you, so that he may warn you and that you may fear Allah, and that you may be blessed with mercy?) [that is, his warning may lead you to stop opposing him as a result of which you may be blessed with mercy]

The substance of the argument is that the making of a human being a messenger of Allah is not a matter of surprise. First of all, Allah Ta'ālā is the Absolute Master. Bestowing on someone the status of a prophet or messenger is His exclusive domain. It is He who does it at His will. No one is in a position to dare have it otherwise. In addition to that, a little deliberation will make it clear that the purpose of sending a prophet or messenger to guide human beings can only be achieved through a human being. This is a mission angels cannot perform.

The reason is that the purpose of prophethood is to bring people round to believe in and obey Allah Ta'ālā and save them from harsh consequences of their opposition to His injunctions - and this can only

be possible when a person from their own kind presents before them a model of the desired conduct and shows before them that it is quite possible to worship Allah and obey His injunctions even with the fulfillment of inherent human needs and desires. If this call was brought forth by angels and they were to put their model before people, it is obvious that people would have found it fairly convenient to say that angels are free of human desires, they are never hungry or thirsty, they never sleep, or get tired. How could they ever become like them? But, when one of their own kind, despite having common human characteristics and desires, walks amongst them as a perfect model of obedience to Divine injunctions, they would be left with no excuse.

It was to point out in this direction that it was said: *لِيُنذِرَكُمْ وَلِتَتَّقُوا* (so that he may warn you and that you may fear Allah). In other words, it means that a person whose warning can make people have fear could only be the one who is of their kind and is an epitome of human traits like them. This is not an unusual doubt for the disbelievers of many communities who have questioned the propriety of having a human being as prophet or messenger. This is the answer given by the Qur'ān to all such doubts. It is certainly regrettable that, despite so many clarifications of the Qur'ān, there are people who would dare going to the limit of denying the 'human-ness' of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. But, the problem with the ignorant among human beings is that they would not understand this reality and would simply refuse to accept the superiority of anyone from their own kind. This is why they would nurse hatred for their contemporary *Awliyā'* (men of Allah) and '*Ulamā'* (highly trained and trustworthy religious scholars who practice what they teach) and look down upon them because of their contemporaneousness. This has always been the trademark of the ignorant.

When this paternal and well-wishing approach of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام in reply to the heart-rending words said by his addressees made no effect on these unfeeling people who turned blind to truth and kept belying it, then, Allah Ta'ālā sent down upon them the punishment of Flood. It was said: *كَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلِّ وَأَغْرَقْنَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا، إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا عَمِينَ* (Then, they belied him [ignoring his good counsel totally], so [as a consequence], we saved him, and those with him in the Ark, and

drowned those who had belied Our signs. Certainly, they were a blind people).

The story of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام and the full account of the drowning of his people and the deliverance of the people in the Ark appears in Sūrah Hūd and Sūrah Nūḥ. Given at this place is its gist as appropriate to the occasion. Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Aslam رحمه الله says: When the punishment of Flood overtook the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, they were at the prime of their population and power. The lands and mountains of Iraq were becoming insufficient for their rising numbers. It should be kept in mind that it is a customary practice of Allah Ta'ālā since ever that He would keep granting respite to the disobedient. He would send His punishment over them at a time when they have reached the highest peak of their numbers, power and wealth, and become, so to say, drunk with this state of their life. (Ibn Kathīr)

As for the number of people in the Ark of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, reports differ. Ibn Kathīr, through a narration of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, reports from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه that there were eighty people. One of them was called Jurhum. He spoke Arabic. (Ibn Kathīr)

Some narrations have given the detail that there were forty men and forty women in the Ark. After the Flood, the place in Mosul, Iraq where they came to stay became known as Thamānūn (eighty).

To sum up, the introduction of a brief account of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام at this place aims to tell us three things: (1) That the *da'wah* of all past prophets and their basic articles of faith were one. (2) That Allah Ta'ālā supports his appointed messengers in strikingly wonderful ways when they would not have the least danger to their security even after having been surrounded by a Flood rising as high as the peaks of mountains. (3) Then, it was made absolutely clear that belying the noble prophets of Allah, may peace be upon them, amounted to inviting Divine punishment. The warning is still valid. So, let it not be forgotten that the way past communities were overtaken by punishment because of their belying of the prophets, a similar fate could overtake their modern counterparts - on this count, they could do better by not becoming heedless and fear-free.

Verses 65 - 72

وَإِلَىٰ عَادِ أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا ۖ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنِّ إِلَهِ
 غَيْرِهِ ۗ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ قَالَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِن قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا
 لَنَرَاكَ فِي سَفَاهَةٍ وَإِنَّا لَنُظَنُّكَ مِنَ الْكٰذِبِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ
 لَيْسَ بِي سَفَاهَةٌ وَلٰكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعٰلَمِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾
 أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَإِنَّا لَكُم نٰصِحٌ ۖ أَمِينٌ ﴿٦٨﴾ أَوْعَجِبْتُمْ أَن
 جَاءَكُم ذِكْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ ۖ وَادْكُرُوا
 إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِن بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَزَادَكُمْ فِي الْخَلْقِ
 بَضْطَةً ۖ فَادْكُرُوا الْآيَةَ ۗ اللَّهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ قَالُوا أَجِئْنَا
 لِنُعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ وَنَذَرَمَا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا ۚ فَاتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا
 إِن كُنْتَ مِنَ الصّٰدِقِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾ قَالَ قَدْ وَقَعَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ
 رَجْسٌ وَغَضَبٌ ۖ أَتُجَادِلُونَنِي فِيٓ أَسْمَاءِ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ
 وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَّا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطٰنٍ ۖ فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ
 مِّنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَقَطَعْنَا
 دَابِرَ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَمَا كَانُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

And to 'Ad (We sent) their brother, Hūd. He said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no god other than Him. So, do you not fear Allah?" [65]

Said the chiefs of his people who disbelieved, "Indeed, we see you in foolishness, and we certainly believe you to be one of the liars." [66]

He said, "O my people, there is no foolishness in me, but I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. [67] I convey to you the messages of my Lord; and for you, I am an honest adviser. [68] Do you wonder that an advice from your Lord has come to you through a man from among you, so that he may warn you? And remember when He made you successors after the people of

Nūḥ and gave you increased strength in physique. So, be mindful of the bounties of Allah, so that you may be successful." [69]

They said, "Have you come to us in order that we should worship Allah alone and give up what our fathers used to worship? Now, bring us what you threaten us with, if you are one of the truthful." [70]

He said, "The punishment and the anger from your Lord have fallen upon you. Do you quarrel with me about names coined by you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority? So, wait. I am one of those waiting, with you." [71]

So, We saved him and those with him out of mercy from Us, and We eradicated those who belied Our signs. And they were not believers. [72]

Commentary

A Brief History of 'Ād and Thamūd

'Ād is the name of a person who is in the fifth generation after Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام and is among the progeny of his son Sām. Then, his progeny, and his people, came to be known by the name of 'Ād. In the Holy Qur'an, 'Ād also appears with the words: عَادٌ أُولَى ('Ād al-'ulā: 'Ād, the First) and also: إِزْمٌ ذَاتُ الْعِمَادِ (that is, of the city of Iram with lofty pillars; or tall like lofty pillars - 89:7) which tells us that the people of 'Ād are also known in association with the name of Iram, and that with 'Ād I, there is some 'Ād II as well. In this investigation, commentators and historians differ. The better known proposition is that Iram is the name of the grandfather of 'Ād. This 'Ād is among the children of 'Aus who was his son, and is known as 'Ād I. His second son, جَثْوُ (Jathw) had a son. His name was Thamūd. He is called 'Ād II. The outcome is that 'Ād and Thamūd are both two branches of Iram. One of them is called 'Ād I and the other is known as Thamūd or 'Ād II, and the word: إِزْمٌ (Iram) is common to both 'Ād and Thamūd.

Some commentators have said that at the time when the punishment overtook the people of 'Ād, a deputation of theirs was on a visit to Makkah al-Mu'zzamah, which remained safe from this punishment. It is known as the other 'Ād. (Bayān al-Qur'an)

Hūd عليه السلام is the name of a prophet. He is also in the fifth generation of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, and is among the progeny of Sām. The geneological tree of the people of 'Ād and Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام converges on Sām in the fifth generation. Therefore, Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام is a lineal brother to 'Ād. That is why it was said: أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا (their brother Hūd - 65)

The people of 'Ād had thirteen families. Their habitations were spread out from Oman to Hadramaut and Yaman. Their lands were fertile. Gardens were abundant. To live they constructed mansions and palaces. They were tall and heavily built. This is what the expression: زَادَكُمْ فِي الْخَلْقِ بَخْطَةً (gave you increased strength in physique - 69) means. Allah Ta'ālā had opened the doors of His blessing upon them. But, their crooked thinking made these very blessings a curse for them. They became so intoxicated with their power and grandeur that they started boasting: مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً (Who is superior to us in strength?- 41:15). How strange of them that they took no notice of their Lord and the Lord of the worlds bathed in whose blessings they all were and went on to sink themselves into the worship of idols carved out of rocks!

The Lineage of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام and Some Glimpses of the Background

These were the people for whose guidance Allah Ta'ālā sent Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام as a prophet who was from their family. The famous authority on Arab geneology, Abū al-Barakāt al-Jaunī has written that the name of the son of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام is Ya'rub ibn Qaḥṭān who went to live in Yaman. Yamani people are his progeny. The Arabic language originated from him and it was this correspondence with 'Ya'rub' that the language was called Arabic and its speakers, the Arabs. (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ)

But, the truth of the matter is that the Arabic language was there since the time of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام. In his Ark, he had a companion called Jurhum. He spoke Arabic (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ) The populating of Makkah al-Mu'azzamah started from this very Jurhum. However, it is possible that the origination of the Arabic language took place in Yaman through Ya'rub ibn Qaḥṭān and this may be what Abū al-Barakāt has meant.

Ṣaiḥah] took them - 23:41). Based on this statement of the Qur'an, some commentators have said that the punishment which was set upon the people of 'Ād was that of Aṣ-Ṣaiḥah (extremely harsh and screaming sound). But, there is no contradiction here. It is possible that they both came to pass.

This was a brief account relating to the people of 'Ād and Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام. Its details as given in the words of the Qur'an follow.

(1) Said in the first verse (65) was: **وَالِىٰ عَادِ أَخَاهُمْ هُوْدًا، قَالَ يَقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللّٰهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ اِلٰهٍ اِلَّا تَتَّقُوْنَ** (And to 'Ād [We sent] their brother, Hūd. He said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no god other than Him. So, do you not fear Allah?").

The grave punishment sent upon the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام much before the people of 'Ād was still alive in the minds of the people of his time. Therefore, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام had no need to describe the severity and gravity of punishment sent upon disobedient people. He considered it quite sufficient to say: Do you not fear Allah?

(2) In the second verse (66), it was said: **قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ اِنَّا لَنَرٰكَ فِى سَفَاهَةٍ وَاِنَّا لَنَظُنُّكَ مِنَ الْكٰذِبِيْنَ** (Said the chiefs of his people who disbelieved, "Indeed, We see you in foolishness, and we certainly believe you to be one of the liars." This stance taken in opposition here resembles the one taken by the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام. The only difference is that of some words. Its reply which appears in verses 67 and 68 is nearly the same as given by Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام - 61-63.

(3) Once again, the objection of the people of 'Ād mentioned in the fifth verse (69) is the same as raised by the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام before them - that is, 'how can we take a human being like us as our superior? Had it been an angel, may be we would have done that.' In answer to this what the Qur'an has mentioned is the reply given by Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام to his people - where he had said that there was nothing to be surprised about the fact that a human being comes to people as the prophet or messenger of Allah to put His fear in their hearts, because it is a human being who can convince other human beings effectively.

After that they were reminded of the blessings Allah Ta'ālā had bestowed upon them. It was said: **وَاذْكُرُوْا اِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَآءَ مِنْۢ بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَّزَادَكُمْ فِى الْخَلْقِ بَصۜطَةً**

فَاذْكُرُوا آلَاءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَفْلِحُونَ (And remember when He made you successors after the people of Nūḥ and gave you increased strength in physique).

Remembering these blessings would have been for their own good, but wicked and intoxicated with power and wealth as they were, they paid no heed and gave a reply which was no different from what is generally given by people who have gone astray. They said that if Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام was trying to wean them away from the faith of their ancestors and hoping that they would abandon their idols and come around to believing in just one God, then, this they would never be able to do. As for the warning of punishment he was giving to them, they would say: go ahead and bring it upon us, if you are telling the truth.

(4) The sixth verse (70) contains the answer given by Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام. He told them that, in view of their contumacy and lack of good sense, the wrath and punishment of Allah would have not remained far and may come sooner than they expect. So, this was a matter of waiting. Let them wait for it, so shall he do. It would be noticed that the provoking reply given by his people prompted Sayyidnā Hūd to give a suitable answer which included the news that the punishment they were looking for was to come soon. But, he was a prophet. His paternal affection and the desire to do good to them forced him to say during the course of his reply that he regretted that his people had taken things without sense and life as objects of worship without having any proof from reason or revelation to support their position. Now they had become so staunch in their devotion to the false that they had started quarreling with him, a prophet of Allah.

(5) In the last verse (72) it was said that the final outcome of the entire struggle of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام against the contumacy of the people of 'Ād was that Allah Ta'ālā kept Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام and those who had believed in him safe from the punishment and cut off the root of those who had belied him - and they were not of those who would have believed.

This story leaves a trail of good counsel. It reminds heedless human beings to keep remembering Allah and take to a life style which is marked with obedience to Him. Then, to those who elect to reject honest advice and refuse to learn a lesson, it shows what to expect in

the end. And, as for preachers and reformers, it is a mirror of the prophetic method of communication in *Tablīgh* and *Iṣlāḥ*.

Verses 73 - 76

وَالِى ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا قَالَ يُقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ
إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ هَذِهِ نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ
فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَمْسُوهَا بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ
عَذَابُ آلِيمٍ ﴿٧٣﴾ وَاذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَادٍ
وَبَوَّأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْ سُهولِهَا قُصُورًا وَتَنْحِتُونَ
الْجِبَالَ بَيْوتًا فَاذْكُرُوا الْآءَ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ
مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾ قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لِلَّذِينَ
اسْتَضَعُّوهُ لِمَنْ لِمَنْ مِنْهُمْ اتَّعَلَمُونَ أَنْ صَالِحًا مُرْسَلٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ
قَالُوا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلَ بِهِ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا
بِالَّذِي أُنْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

And to Thamūd, (We sent) their brother, Ṣāliḥ. He said, "O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. There has come to you a clear sign from your Lord. This is the she-camel of Allah, a sign for you. So, leave her to eat on the earth of Allah and do not touch her with mischief, lest a painful punishment should seize you. [73] And remember when He made you successors after 'Ād and lodged you on earth (whereby) you make castles in its plains and hew out the mountains into houses. So be mindful of the bounties of Allah, and do not go about the earth spreading disorder."

[74]

The chiefs of his people, who were arrogant, said to the weakened, to those of them who believed, "Are you sure that Ṣāliḥ is a messenger from his Lord?" They said, "Surely, we believe in what he has been sent with." [75] Those who were arrogant said, "Surely, we disbelieve in what you believe in." [76]

Commentary

These verses tell us about Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام and his people, the Thamūd. The account of the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام and Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام has appeared earlier. Similar introductions of past prophets and their peoples, highlighting the call of truth given by prophets and the disbelief and denial of their peoples, and the terrible consequences that overtook them continue to be the main subject as far as the end of Sūrah al-A'raf.

In the first of the four verses cited above (73), it was said: **وَإِلَىٰ ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا** (And to Thamūd, [We sent] their brother, Ṣāliḥ). Earlier, in the account given about the people of 'Ād, it was stated that 'Ād and Thamūd is the name of two persons who are among the progeny of the same grandfather. The children of these two also came to be known by their name and their two groups became two separate peoples. One of them was called the people of 'Ād and the other, the people of Thamūd. They lived in the north-western part of Arabia. Their main city was called Hījr which is now known as Madā'in Ṣāliḥ. Like the people of 'Ād, the people of Thamūd were also wealthy, powerful, brave and artistically inclined. They were skilled in sculpture and architecture. Besides making palaces on open grounds, they were known to hew out mountains and create living spaces and structures on and inside them. In his book, 'Arḍ al-Qur'an, Maulānā Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi has said that their architectural momentos still exist. They have Iramic and Thamūdīc inscriptions carved on them.

It generally happens that worldly wealth and high living would estrange people away from the remembrance of their Creator and the ultimate encounter with Him in the Hereafter and push them on to the ways of error - as was the case with the people of Thamūd.

Not forgotten by the world of the time, though, was the punishment of Flood that came upon the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام. Then, for them, the destruction of their brethren, the people of 'Ād was current history. But, wealth and power have a pull of their own. No sooner does one affluent structure collapse on its foundation, there comes another person, another group who would raise a higher structure on the same foundation totally ignoring what had happened before. When the people of 'Ād were destroyed, the people of Thamūd in-

herited their mansions and lands and it was at the same places they erected their venues of luxury, places where their own brethren had faced destruction. And as if this was not enough, they started indulging in the same deeds as were done by the people of 'Ād. They too became heedless of their Creator and unmindful of the Hereafter only to stoop to the level of worshiping idols and associating others in the Divinity of Allah. Then, Allah Ta'ālā - in accordance with His constant practice - sent Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام as His messenger so that he would guide them on to the straight path. Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام, in terms of his lineage and country, was one of the people of Thamūd as he too came from the progeny of Sām. Therefore, the Qur'ān has called him a brother of the people of Thamūd - as in: أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا (their brother, Ṣāliḥ - 73). The call given by Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام to his people is no different from the call messengers from Sayyidnā Adam عليه السلام to the last of them have been giving all along - as mentioned in the Qur'ān: وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ (We have sent to every community a messenger so that he tells them to worship Allah and shun idols - 16:36). This is what Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام said to his people, just as it was done by past prophets: يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ (O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him).

Then, along with it, he also said: فَذُجَانُكُمْ بَيْتُهُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ that is, now there has come to you from your Lord a very clear sign. This 'sign' refers to the unusual she-camel which finds a brief mention in the present verse while details appear in different Sūrahs of the Qur'ān. The background of this event concerning the she-camel goes back to the time when Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام started preaching as a young man. He kept doing his duty until marks of old age started showing on him. He still did not seem to give up. His people became impatient with his repeated efforts to make them believe in one God. So they decided to come up with a demand which it would be impossible for him to fulfill and, as a result, they would prevail as winners of the confrontation. The demand that they made was: If you are really a messenger of Allah, make a she-camel come out from Katibah, this hill of ours, and it has to be in its tenth month of pregnancy while being strong and healthy.

The first thing Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام did was to take a pledge

from them. He asked them if he fulfilled this demand of theirs, would they all believe in him and in his Da'wah. When all of them made a compact, Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام made two *raka'at* of Ṣalāh and made a *Du'a'* before Allah Ta'ālā: For You nothing is difficult. Let their demand be fulfilled. Soon after the *Du'a'*, there was a rumble in the hill, a big rock blasted out, and out came a she-camel as demanded.

Seeing this mind-boggling miracle of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام, some from among those people became believers instantly. As for the rest of them, they too decided to enter the fold of faith they have been rejecting upto that time. But, some of their chiefs who were the real promoters of idol-worship, talked them out of it. When Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام saw that his people had broken the pledge, he was concerned for them. The danger was that they might be subjected to punishment for having done that. Thus, feeling for them, he advised them not to harm the she-camel in any way, and keep protecting it, in which case, they may stay safe against the danger of punishment, otherwise, they might be seized in punishment immediately. This is the subject matter of what has been said in the following sentences of verse 73: هَذِهِ نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذْكُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (This is the she-camel of Allah, a sign for you. So, leave her to eat on the earth of Allah and do not touch her with mischief, lest a painful punishment should seize you). This she-camel has been called 'the she-camel of Allah' because it was a proof of the perfect power of Allah and had appeared in an extraordinary manner as a miracle of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام. The expression: تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ (to eat on the earth of Allah) indicates that the she-camel should be left free to eat and drink because what she would eat and drink was not owned by them. The earth belonged to Allah and He was the creator of the produce it yielded. So, she was to be left free to eat from the natural grazing grounds of the earth of Allah.

The well from which the people of Thamūd got their water was the one from which this she-camel got her share of water to drink. But, when this she-camel, an extra ordinary creation of Allah, drank her share of water, she would drink up all the water in the well. Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام had, following the Divine will, given the verdict that the she-camel would drink water from the well one day and the next day the rest of Thamūd people will have water from the well for them-

selves. It so happened that the day the she-camel drank water from the well, others would get milk from the she-camel, in lieu of water, in such quantity that they would fill out their water containers with it. This distribution of water has been referred to elsewhere in the Qur'an in the following words addressed to Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ (عليه السلام): رَبِّبْتُهُمْ أَنْ الْمَاءَ: (4:28) قِسْمَةٌ بَيْنَهُمْ كُلَّ شَرْبٍ مُحْتَضَرٌ that is, the water of the well is to be divided between them, one day for the she-camel and the other for his people, and this distribution will be watched by angels lest anyone does against it.' In another verse (26:155), it was said: هَذِهِ نَاقَةٌ لَهَا شُرْبٌ وَلَكُمْ شُرْبٌ يَوْمَ هَذِهِ نَاقَةٌ لَهَا شُرْبٌ وَلَكُمْ شُرْبٌ يَوْمَ مَعْلُومٌ that is, 'this is a she-camel of Allah; water for one day is her right and water for the other day is fixed for you'.

In the second verse (74), concern has been shown for these pledge-breaking and contumacious people lest they find themselves subjected to Divine punishment. For this purpose they have been reminded of the favours and blessings of Allah Ta'ālā upon them in the hope that they would alter their uncompromising stance and abandon their doggedness and rebellion. It was said: وَأذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَبَوَّأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَبَوَّأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَتَخَذُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِهَا قُصُورًا وَتَنْحِتُونَ الْجِبَالَ بُيُوتًا (And remember when He made you successors after 'Ād and lodged you on earth [whereby] you make castles in its plains and hew out the mountains into houses). Here, the word: خُلَفَاءَ (*khulafā*) is the plural of *khalīfah* which means deputy or viceregent and: قُصُورَ (*quṣūr*) is the plural of *qaṣr* which means a palace or palatial building. The word: تَنْحِتُونَ (*tanḥitūna*) is a derivation from *naḥṭ* which means sculpture or stone-carving. 'Jibāl' is the plural of *jabal* meaning a mountain. 'Buyūt' is the plural of *bayt* which denotes a house or rooms in it. The sense of the verse is that they should remember the blessing of Allah Ta'ālā that He, after the destruction of the people of 'Ād, brought them to settle in their place, gave their lands and homes to them as the new owners, and bestowed on them the skill with which they could raise big palaces on open surfaces and hew out mountains to make rooms and apartments inside them. Then, at the end of the verse, it was said: فَادْكُرُوا آلَاءَ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ (So be mindful of the bounties of Allah, and do not go about the earth spreading disorder).

Injunctions and Rulings

Some fundamental and subsidiary rulings emerge from the cited

verse. These are as follows:

(1) There is a unanimous agreement of all prophets, may peace be upon them all, on fundamental articles of faith and, similarly, united stand their religious codes or Shari'ahs. All of them invite towards Tauḥīd or absolutely pure monotheism as the basis of worshipping Allah, and they all warn against contravention of this concept which brings punishment in this world and in the Hereafter.

(2) It has happened in past communities too that the wealthy and the traditional holders of social prestige have not said yes to the call of prophets as a result of which they were disgraced and destroyed in this world and became deserving of punishment in the Hereafter as well.

(3) According to Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī, this verse tells us that the blessings of Allah in this world are directed to and shared by disbelievers as well - as was the case with the people of 'Ād and Thamūd to whom Allah Ta'ālā had given great wealth and power.

(4) According to Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī, once again, this verse tells us that palaces and mansions are blessings of Allah Ta'ālā and their making is permissible.

However, this is an entirely different matter that the noble prophets and the men of Allah have not favoured them as they make people heedless. The sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم about high-rising buildings are of this nature.

The Confrontation Between the Arrogant and the Weakened

The third (75) and the fourth (76) verses carry a dialogue between two groups of the people of Thamūd. One of these was of those who had come to believe that Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام was a prophet while the other was that of deniers and disbelievers. Says the verse: قَالُوا كَذَّبَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا كَذَّبُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا لِمَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ (The chiefs of his people, who were arrogant said to the weakened, to those of them who believed).

In Tafsīr Kabīr, Imām Rāzī has said: At this place, the Holy Qur'an identifies two qualities of these two groups, but the quality or trait of the disbelievers was mentioned in the active voice (اسْتَكْبَرُوا): who were arrogant) while the quality or state of the believers was identified

through the passive (*أُسْتُضْعِفُوا* : the weakened). It indicates that the condition of the disbelievers - that they were arrogant - was what they chose to do at their own discretion which was questionable and blameworthy, and which finally became the cause of their punishment. As for the quality or state of believers which these people put as weak and low, it was something said by disbelievers. Their description had nothing to do with the actual state and quality of believers, something which could be considered blameworthy in any manner whatsoever. In fact, blameworthy are those who call them weak and low, and take them to be so, without any reason. After that comes the dialogue which has occurred between these two groups where the disbelievers said to the believers: 'Are you sure that Ṣāliḥ is a messenger from his Lord?'

The reply given by the believers was: 'Surely , we believe in what he has been sent with.'

The famous Tafsīr Kashshāf says: What an eloquent answer was given by the believers from the people of Thamūd when they said: 'All this debate of yours - is he a messenger of Allah or is he not? - is just not worth debating. In fact, this is obvious, foregone and certain. And equally certain is that what he says is a message brought from Allah Ta'ālā. If there is anything worth talking about here, it is: Who believes in him and who does not? So, as for us, praise be to Allah, we do believe in every word of guidance brought by him.'

But, even this eloquent answer could not soften the disbelieving people of Thamūd. They countered back coldly and arrogantly saying that they rejected what they had accepted. The lust of worldly life is merciless. So is the toxic elation of having wealth and power. May Allah Ta'ālā keep all of us protected for they become invisible curtains before human eyes which would not let those seeing eyes see the obvious.

Verses 77 - 79

فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقَالُوا يُصَلِحُ آتِنَا بِمَا
تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ

فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جُثَمِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾ فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَاقَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُحِبُّونَ
التَّصْحِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

Then they slaughtered the she-camel and defied the command of their Lord and said, "O Ṣāliḥ, bring us what you threaten us with, if you are one of the messengers." [77] So, the earthquake seized them, and they were (found dead) in their homes, fallen on their breasts. [78]

So, he turned away from them and said, "O my people, I have certainly delivered to you the message of my Lord, and wished you betterment, but you do not like the sincere advisers." [79]

Commentary

It has appeared in previous verses that the *Du'ā'* of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام had made a big rock open up in the nearby mountain through which an extra-ordinary she-camel had come out. Then, Allah Ta'ālā had made this she-camel the last trial for these people as she drank up all water from the well which was used by the people and animals of the locality for their needs. Therefore, Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام had fixed turns, a day for the she-camel and another for the people of the area.

The people of Thamūd were in trouble because of this she-camel. They wished she would somehow die. But, they did not dare do it themselves lest they are hit by some Divine punishment.

But, Satan has an unlimited array of weapons. One of his deadliest strategies of deception which makes human beings surrender whatever sense and sensibility they have is the trial through women. So, two beautiful damsels from the people of Thamūd threw a wager: Whoever kills this she-camel could take us, or anyone from among our girls to become his own.

Two youngmen from Thamūd, called Miṣḍa' and Qadhār, all drunk with the rosy prospect, went out to kill the she-camel. They hid themselves behind a big rock and waited for the she-camel to pass by them on its usual route. When the she-camel appeared before them, Miṣḍa'

hit her with an arrow and Qadhār hamstrung her by cutting her legs with his sword. Thus, they killed the she-camel.

The Holy Qur'an calls this person the most cruel and wretched from among the people of Thamūd: إِذْ أَنْبَعَتْ أَشْقَبَهَا (when the one, most wicked of them, was sent [incited to kill her] - 91:12) because that was what brought mass punishment on the people of Thamūd.

Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام, after having found that the she-camel has been killed, told his people - as Divinely commanded - that they have only three days to live: تَتَّعْتُمْ فِي دَارِكُمْ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ ذَلِكَ وَعْدٌ غَيْرُ مَكْذُوبٍ that is, 'enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days (only) [after that the punishment is coming]. That is a promise, not going to be false - 11:65.' But, when the undoing of a people becomes due, no advice or warning works. This is what happened with these wretched people. Even the very honest counsel of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام did not produce the desired effect. In turn, they started making fun of him by challenging him as to how and from where would this punishment come and what would be the signs of its coming.

Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام said: 'You want signs, so hear this. Tomorrow, on Thursday, your faces will turn dark yellow. Men, women, the young and the old, no one will remain exempted. Then, day after tomorrow, on Friday, all faces will turn dark red; and on Saturday, the third day to come, all faces will turn jet black. And this day will be the last day of your life.' Despite having heard what was said, these wretched people, rather than repent and seek forgiveness, decided that they better kill Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام himself. Their 'logic' was: If he is true and the punishment has to come upon them, why should they not finish him first before the punishment comes to finish them - and if he is a liar, then, let him have his punishment for lying. This intention of the people of Thamūd finds mention in details at other places in the Qur'an. Under this unanimous verdict of the Thamudites, some of them went to the house of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام with the intention of killing him. But, as Allah Ta'ālā would have it, they were killed by a hail of rocks while still on their way. Says the Qur'an: وَمَكْرُؤًا مَكَرًا وَ مَكْرُؤًا مَكَرًا وَ مَكْرُؤًا مَكَرًا that is, 'and they made a plan and We made a plan and they were not aware' - 27:50.

When came the morning of Thursday, then, as stated by Sayyidnā

Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام, the faces of all of them turned as yellow as if painted with a deep yellow colour. The first sign of the coming of punishment stood proved true. Yet, those tyrants were not to be mellowed enough to believe in Allah Ta'ālā and desist from their wrongdoings. In fact, their wrath on Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام increased all the more and everyone started running around to find and kill him. May Allah Ta'ālā protect everyone from His wrath, for that too has its signs which turn hearts and minds upside down, when people start taking their gain as their loss, and their loss as their gain, and their good as bad, and their bad as good.

At last came the second day and, true to the prophecy, everyone's face turned red; and then, came the third day when they turned jet black. Now there was nowhere to go. All disappointed, they stood waiting to see which way the punishment comes.

In this state of theirs, a severe earthquake struck from down below the earth, and from above tore in a horrendously shrill cry, an awesomely severe sound. This cry or sound caused everyone to die, instantly and simultaneously, fallen upside down, (like some dead bird landing on the ground on its breast - see 'Jāthimīn' in Mufradāt al-Qur'ān). As for the coming of the earthquake, it does find mention in verse 78 which appears above, that is: فَآخَذْتَهُمُ الرِّجْفَةُ (So, the earthquake seized them). The word: الرِّجْفَةُ (ar-rajfah) means earthquake.

Other verses of the Qur'ān have also mentioned: فَآخَذْتَهُمُ الصَّيْحَةُ (that is, a Cry or Sound seized them - 15:83). The word: الصَّيْحَةُ (Aṣ-Ṣaiḥah) means a shrill cry or severe sound. From these two verses, we find out that two kinds of punishment had simultaneously converged on the people of Thamūd, the earthquake from below and the 'Ṣaiḥah' from above. The result was: فَاصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جُنُودًا (and they were [found dead] in their homes, fallen on their knees - 77). The word: جُنُودًا (jāthimīn) is a derivation from the verbal noun: *Juthūm*, which means to be rendered senseless and motionless at one spot, or remain sitting (Al-Qamūs). The sense is that everyone lay dead as and where one was. نَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ قَهْرِهِ وَعَذَابِهِ (We seek refuge with Allah from His Wrath and His Punishment).

Important parts of this story of the people of Thamūd have been mentioned in the different Sūrahs of the Qur'ān itself. Some parts appear in Ḥadīth narrations. There are some others which commentators

have taken from Israelite narratives, but the proof of an event or its reality does not depend on them.

It appears in a Ḥadīth of the Ṣaḥīḥ of Al-Bukhārī that, during a journey related to the Battle of Tabūk, the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his Ṣaḥābah passed by Hījr, the place where the people of Thamūd had faced their punishment. At that spot, he gave instructions to the Ṣaḥābah that no one should go into the land area of that punishment-stricken habitation, nor should anyone use water from its wells. (Mazhari)

According to some narrations, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said: When the punishment overtook the people of Thamūd, no one survived except one person, Abū Righāl. He was in the Ḥaram of Makkah at that time. Allah Ta'ālā spared him of the punishment at that time because of the sanctity of the Ḥaram of Makkah. Finally, when he came out of the Ḥaram, the same punishment which had seized his people visited him as well, and right there he met his death. The Holy Prophet ﷺ also showed people the marks of the grave of Abū Righāl on the outskirts of Makkah; and he also said that a walking stick made of gold was also buried with him. When the Ṣaḥābah opened the grave, they found the gold stick there which was taken out. Mentioned in the same narration is that Banū Thaḳīf, the inhabitants of Ṭā'if are the progeny of this very Abū Righāl. (Mazhari)

Allah Ta'ālā, in His infinite wisdom, has allowed these habitations of punished peoples to stay as signposts of lesson for coming generations. The Holy Qur'an has repeatedly warned the people of Arabia that these places which come on their travel route to Syria should bring home to them their essential lesson in the rise and fall of peoples: لَمْ تُسْكَنْ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا that is, (these are the dwellings of ungrateful people We destroyed and which) have not been lived in after them, except a little - 28:58).

After the mention of the event of punishment which overtook the people of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام, it was finally said: فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُحِبُّونَ النَّصِيحِينَ (So, he turned away from them and said, "O my people, I have certainly delivered to you the message of my Lord, and wished you betterment, but you people do not like the sincere advisers - 79), that is, after the visit of punishment on his peo-

ple, Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام and those who had believed in him left that place and went somewhere else. In some narrations, it appears that there were four thousand believers with Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام. He went along with them to Hadramaut in Yaman. It was there that Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام passed away from this mortal world. However, some narrations report his going to Makkah al-Mu'azzamah and where it was that he passed away.

From the outward arrangement of the text, it appears that Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام addressed his people while departing - O my people, I have certainly delivered to you the message of my Lord and have wished the best for you, but you do not seem to like honest advisers.

The question is when his people have been destroyed by the punishment, what is the use of addressing them now. The answer is that one good that may come out of it is that people in general would learn their lesson. This form of address resembles the address of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم when he had said a few words addressing dead disbelievers from the tribe of Quraysh in the Battle of Badr. And then, it is also possible that this saying of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام came to pass before the coming of the punishment and the destruction of his people - though, in the textual arrangement, it has been mentioned later.

Verses 80 - 84

وَلَوْ طَآءُ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ
مِّنَ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّنْ دُونِ
النِّسَاءِ ۗ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ ﴿٨١﴾ وَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ
إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِّنْ قَرْيَتِكُمْ إِنَّهُمْ أَنَاسٌ يَّتَطَهَّرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾
فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾ وَأَمْطَرْنَا
عَلَيْهِمْ مَّطَرًا ۗ فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

And (We sent) Lūṭ when he said to his people, "Do you commit the shameful act in which nobody has ever preceded you from all the worlds? [80] Surely, you come to

men lustfully instead of women. No, you are a people who cross the limits.” [81]

And the answer of his people was not but that they said, “Expel them from your town. They are a people who seek to be pure.” [82] So, We saved him and his family, except his wife. She was one of the rest. [83] And We rained down upon them a rain. So look, how was the fate of the sinners! [84]

Commentary

Out of the continuing series of stories relating to prophets عليهم السلام and their communities, the fourth story is that of Sayyidnā Lūṭ (Lot) عليه السلام.

Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام is a nephew of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm Khalīlullāh عليه السلام, the patriarch of prophets. The original homeland of both was known as Babel near Baṣrah in western Irāq. Idol-worship was common. Even the family of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was involved in it. Allah Ta'ālā sent Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام as a prophet for their guidance. His people opposed him which culminated in the well known Fire of Nimrūd. Even his father threatened to turn him out of his home.

Out of his entire family, only his wife, Sayyidah Sārah and nephew, Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام embraced Islam: فَأَمِنَ لَهُ لُوطٌ (Then, Lūṭ believed in him - 29:26). Finally, it was with these two that he emigrated to Syria leaving his home country behind. After reaching Jordon river, he settled in Can'an near Bayt al-Maqdis under a Divine command.

Then, Allah Ta'ālā made Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام too a prophet and sent him to Sadūm (Sodom) near Bayt al-Maqdis for the guidance of people there. This area comprised of five major cities. They were called Sadūm, 'Amūrah, Admah, Sububim and Bālī' or Sawghar. The Qur'an has referred to their nucleus as 'Mu'tafikah' and 'Mu'tafikat' at several places. Sadūm was considered as the center and capital of these cities. It was here that Sayyidnā Lut عليه السلام stayed. The land was fertile and verdant abounding in all kinds of grains and fruits. (These details appear in Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ, Maḥzarī, Ibn Kathīr, Al-Manār etc.)

Man's habit, as Allah Ta'ālā says in the Qur'an, is: كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظِرٌ that is, when he acquires freedom from need, he starts trans-

gressing the limits - 96:6. On these people too, Allah Ta'ālā had opened the doors of His blessings. Goaded by this common behaviour pattern, all soaked in wealth and possessions, they reached the farthest ends of luxury and lust when they stood deprived of the most essential human sense of honour, dignity and modesty, and lost in that process, the very ability to distinguish between the good and the bad. In consequence, they got themselves involved in acts of unnatural indecencies. These are abominal acts, apart from being Ḥarām and sinful, acts which cause hatred and distaste in the heart and mind of everyone born with sound and decent taste, so much so, that even animals would not go near it.

Allah Ta'ālā appointed Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام for their guidance. He addressed his people and said: *أَأْتَاوْنَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ* (Do you commit the shameful act in which nobody has ever preceded you from all the worlds?).

When referring to Zinā (adultery), the Qur'ān has said: *إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً* (Surely, it is a shameful act - 17:32). Here, the word: *فَاحِشَهُ* (*fāḥishah*: shameful act) has been mentioned without 'Alif Lām while in the present verse, by saying: *الْفَاحِشَةُ* (*al-fāḥishah* : the shameful act), it has been made definite by the addition of 'Alif Lām. Thus, the hint given is that this unnatural evil act is, as if, the combination of all indecencies, and far grave a crime as compared to Zinā.

Then, it was said that this shameful act has never been committed by anyone in all the worlds before they did it. 'Amrū ibn Dīnār has said: The act was unknown in the world before these people. (Mazḥarī) Neither had the worst of human being had ever thought on those lines before the people of Sadūm. The Umayyad Khalīfah, 'Abd al-Mālik said: Had this event relating to the people of Lūṭ عليه السلام not been mentioned in the Qur'ān, I would have never suspected that a human being could do something like that. (Ibn Kathīr)

Here, their immodesty has been censured on two grounds: (1) It so happens that men would get involved in many sins because of their social conditions, or because of a blind following of their ancestors - though, that too, is not a valid legal excuse in the Shari'ah of Islam. But, as a matter of customary practice, such a person could be taken as excusable in some or the other degree. But, when it comes to a sin

which has never been committed by anyone before, nor does it have any particular compulsions of its own, it becomes a curse of the highest degree. (2) The other ground is that this act becomes a channel of making others equally accursed. Think of a person who invents some evil act or custom. As obvious, the sin and punishment of his evil act falls on that person anyway, but, alongwith him, affected are all who sink in sin led by the act of the originator right through the Last Day, for the curse and punishment of all those so affected also sits on the shoulders of the originator of the evil.

In the second verse (81), this immodesty has been stated more explicitly - 'Surely, you come to men lustfully instead of women.' Here, the hint given is that, for the natural satisfaction of human desire, Allah Ta'ālā has appointed marrying women as a lawful method. Now, to bypass it and opt for an unnatural method is bland ugliness of the human self and certainly the proof of a dirty mind.

Therefore, the Ṣaḥābah, the Ṭābi'īn and Mujtahid Imāms have declared this crime and sin to be far more grave than other acts of shame. Imām Abū Ḥanīfah has said: The punishment given to the person who commits this act should match the punishment which came upon the people of Lūṭ عليه السلام by the command of Allah Ta'ālā - that rocks rained from the skies and the floor of the earth flipped upside down. Therefore, this person should be pushed down from a high mountain and rocks should be thrown from above on top of him. According to a narration of Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه in the Musnad of Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said about the people who commit this evil act: فاقتلوا الفاعل والمفعول: that is, the doer of this evil deed and his passive partner (*al-maf'ūlu bihī*: with whom it was done) should both be killed. (Ibn Kathīr)

At the end of the verse (81), it was said: بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ (No, you are a people who cross the limits). In other words, their real disease was that they would go beyond the limits set by Allah for everything - in their case, it would be the very limit of humanity they would be hopping over. The same thing happened about sexual desire when they crossed the limits appointed by Allah only to reach for a taste of the counter-natural.

In the third verse (82), the answer given by the people of Sayyidnā

Lūṭ عليه السلام in response to his word of advice has been put in a way that it shows that his people could not find a suitable rejoinder to what he had said. But, they were still adamant and started saying among themselves that these people seem to be self-righteous claiming a lot of purity for themselves. The treatment they deserved was that they should be thrown out of their town.

Mentioned in the fourth (83) and the fifth (84) verses is the Divine punishment given to the people of Sadūm for their crooked and immodest practice. As a consequence, the punishment of Allah Ta'ālā descended on the entire people with the exception of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام and some of his companions who remained safe from the punishment. The words of the Qur'an say: فَانجَيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ (We saved him and his 'ahl'). Who were these 'ahl'? Some commentators say that included in 'ahl' were two women who had become Muslims. The wife was not. Mentioned in another verse of the Qur'an is: فَمَا وَجَدْنَا فِيهَا غَيْرَ بَيْتٍ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ that is, in all those habitations, there was no Muslim home except one - 51:36. This obviously shows that only people from the household of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام were the ones who were saved from the punishment - and that did not include his wife. Some other commentators say that 'ahl' is general. It refers to his own family as well as others who had joined him by embracing Islam. To sum up, it can be said that they were a counted few Muslims to save whom Allah Ta'ālā ordered Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام to take, except his wife, with him and get out of that habitation late in the night and be sure not to look back, because when they are out of the habitation, the punishment would instantly descend on those in it.

Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام followed the Divine command. He went out of the limits of Sadūm with his family and companions late in the night. There are two reports about the wife: (1) She just did not go with them; (2) That she did start off with them and walked on for a while, but since she was eager to see the fate of the people she had left behind, quite contrary to the initial Divine command, she was seized by the punishment. This event has been mentioned in the Qur'an at several occasions in varying details. Here, in the fourth verse (83), it has been briefly said that Allah Ta'ālā saved Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام and his family and companions from the punishment, but his wife was left

with the rest in it. The additional details of how they were saved and how they were asked to leave the habitation late in night and were not to look back appear in other verses.

In the fifth verse (84), the punishment which came on these people has been described in a few words - that an unusual rain was sent upon them. The details of this punishment appear in Sūrah Hūd where it is said:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَالِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّنْ سِجِّيلٍ
مَّنصُودٍ . مُسَوِّمَةً عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ بِبَعِيدٍ

(So, when Our command came, We turned its highest into its lowest, and We rained on it stones of hard clay, one over another marked, with your Lord. And they are not far from the transgressors - 11:82-83).

This tells us that the rain of stones came from above and from down below, angel Jibra'il lifted up the whole crust of the earth and threw it back upside down. Then, the stones which rained down were one over the other, that is, the stone rained so ceaselessly that they kept collecting one on top the next. These stones were marked. Some commentators say that every such stone was marked with the name of the person who was destined to be destroyed with it. And in the verses of Sūrah Al-Hijr, also mentioned before the account of the punishment is: فَآخَذْتَهُمُ الصَّيْحَةُ مُشْرِقِينَ that is, a Sound seized them at sunrise - 15:73).

This indicates that first to come was some harsh Sound from the skies, then came other punishments. The outward arrangement of the words shows that it was after this Sound that the earth crust was turned upside down and then, stones were rained on them to put a stamp on their disgrace. And it is also possible that the rain of stones came first and the turning over of the earth crust came later. The reason is that, given the style of the Qur'an, it is not necessary that something mentioned earlier should have also occurred earlier.

Out of the horrendous punishments sent on the people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, the punishment of turning the floor of the earth upside down has a particular correspondence with their act of shame and immodesty because they were guilty of perversion.

Towards the end of the verses of Sūrah Hūd cited a little earlier, the Qur'an has warned the people of Arabia when it says: وَمَا مِنْ الظَّالِمِينَ that is, these upturned habitations were not far from the transgressors. They pass by them while traveling to Syria but it is surprising that they would learn no lesson from them.

And these sights are not restricted with the time the Holy Qur'an was being revealed. They are still there between Bayt al-Maqdis and Jordan river, particularly the area known as the Sea of Lūt or the Dead Sea. It lies way deep below the sea level. On a particular section, there is water which is unusual. No sea life survives there. Hence, the name: Dead Sea. This is said to be the legendary Sodom. May Allah keep us safe from His Punishment and Wrath.

Verses 85 - 87

وَاللّٰى مَدْيَنَ اٰخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا قَالَ يٰقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللّٰهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ
 اِلٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَاقُوْا اَلْكَیْلَ
 وَالْمِيزَانَ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوْا النَّاسَ اَشْيَآءَهُمْ وَلَا تَفْسُدُوْا فِى
 الْاَرْضِ بَعْدَ اِصْلَاحِهَا ذٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِيْنَ
 ﴿٨٥﴾ وَلَا تَقْعُدُوْا بِكُلِّ صِرَاطٍ تُوعِدُوْنَ وَتَصُدُوْنَ عَنْ سَبِيْلِ
 اللّٰهِ مِنْ اَمْنٍ بِهٖ وَتَبْغُوْنَهَا عِوَجًا وَاذْكُرُوْا اِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيْلًا
 فَكْتَرْتُمْ وَاَنْظُرُوْا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِيْنَ ﴿٨٦﴾ وَاِنْ كَانَ
 طَآئِفَةٌ مِّنْكُمْ اٰمَنُوْا بِالَّذِىْ اُرْسِلْتُ بِهٖ وَطَآئِفَةٌ لَّمْ يُؤْمِنُوْا
 فَاصْبِرُوْا حَتّٰى يَحْكُمَ اللّٰهُ بَيْنَنَا وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحٰكِمِيْنَ ﴿٨٧﴾

And (We sent) to Madyan his brother, Shu'aib. He said, "O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. There has come to you a clear sign from your Lord. And fill the measure and weight in full, and do not make people short of their things, and do not make mischief on the earth after it has been set in order. That is good for you, if you are believers. [85] And do not sit in every path threatening, and prevent from the

way of Allah the people who believe in Him, and seeking a twist in it. And remember the time when you were few, then He increased you in number. And look, how was the fate of the mischief makers. [86] And if a group from among you has believed in what I have been sent with, and another group has not believed then, keep patience until Allah decides between us. And He is the best of all judges.” [87]

Commentary

The series of stories relating to prophets عليه السلام continues. The fifth story appears in the verses quoted above. This is the story of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام and his people.

Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام, according to Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, is among the progeny of Madyan, the son of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, and he is also related to Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام. The lineal descendants of Madyan, the son of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام also came to be known by the name, Madyan - and the locality where they lived is also called Madyan. Thus, Madyan is the name of a people and the name of a city as well. This city still survives near the port of Ma'an in Eastern Jordan. When relating the story of Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام elsewhere, the Qur'an says: *وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ* (And when he arrived at the watering [place] in Madyan - 28:23), it is referring to this very habitation. (Ibn Kathīr) Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام was known for his impressive oratory because of which he was called the Orator among Prophets. (Ibn Kathīr, Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ)

The people to whom Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام was sent have been identified by the Holy Qur'an as the residents or people of Madyan, and also as the people of *Aikah*. The word: *ايكه* (*Aikah*) means a forest.

Some commentators say that these were two different people and lived in separate settlements. Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام was sent to one of them first. When they were destroyed, he was sent to the other. The punishment which came upon these two has also been stated in different words. The punishment of the *Rajfah* on the people of Madyan is mentioned as *Ṣaiḥah* (Sound) at some places, while as *Rajfah* (earthquake) at others. The punishment of the people of *Aikah* has been stated as being that of *Zullah* (shade, canopy). The form in which this punishment came was that the people of *Aikah* were first subject-

ed to intense heat in their locality which almost roasted them. Then, in the forest closeby there came a dense cloud which cast its shade over the entire forest. Attracted by the shade and cool breeze there, all inhabitants of the locality assembled under the shade of that cloud. As Divine arrangement would have it, here were its criminals walking on their two feet and reaching the exact spot where they were to be destroyed, without a warrant of arrest and without a police gun pointed at them. Once they were all there, the clouds rained fire and the earthquake shook the earth. That killed them all.

Then, there are other commentators who say that the people of Madyan and the people of *Aikah* are the same people and the three kinds of punishment mentioned here converged on these people. First came the Fire from the clouds, then, with it, rose the piercing Sound, and then, the earthquake shook the earth. Ibn Kathīr has favoured this view.

However, whether these two people are separate or are two names of the same people, what matters is the message of truth delivered to them by Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام - and that has been mentioned in the first (85) and second (86) verses. Before we move on to the explanation of this message, let us first understand that the essence of Islam, which is the combined call of all blessed prophets, is the fulfillment of mutual rights. Then rights are of two kinds. First come rights which are related directly to Allah Ta'ālā. No visible human gain or loss seems to depend on their fulfillment or abandonment, for example, praying and fasting (Ṣalāh and Ṣawm). Secondly, there are the rights of the servants of Allah (Ḥuqūq al-'Ibād: human rights - in secular terminology) which are related to human beings. These people were heedless to and unaware of both these rights, in fact, were acting counter to both.

By not believing in Allah Ta'ālā and His messengers, they were violating the rights of Allah, and on top of it, by decreasing weights and measures, they were slicing through and wasting away the rights of human beings. Then, such people would go on to sit on entry points of roads and streets and would terrorize all comers, rob them of their belongings, and warned them of worse consequences if they believed in Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام. And thus, on God's good earth, they had

made disorder the order of the day. It was to correct these misdeeds that Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام was sent to them.

In the first and second verses quoted above, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام said three things to correct the course of his people: (1) First he said: يُقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَهِ غَيْرُهُ (O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him). This is the same *Da'wah*, the call to *Tauhid*, the Oneness of Allah, which all blessed prophets have been giving all along the lanes of time, a call which is the spirit of all true beliefs and deeds. Since these people too were all sold to the worship of the created, and consequently, heedless to the sacred Being and Attributes of Allah Ta'ālā, and thus, neglectful of the fulfillment of His rights. Therefore, this was the first message given to them. (2) Then, it was said: قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ (There has come to you a clear sign from your Lord). Here, 'clear signs' or proofs refers to the miracles which were manifested at the hands of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام. The different forms in which these miracles had appeared find mention in Tafsīr Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ.

(3) The statement which follows lays down a major rule of just conduct. It was said: فَارْزُقُوا الْكَيْلَ وَالْمِيزَانَ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ (And fill the measure and weight in full, and do not make people short of their things). The word: كَيْل (kail) means measure, and: مِيزَان (mīzān) is used in the sense of weighing, and: بَخَس (bakhs) means to bring loss on someone by giving one less than what is due. Thus, the instruction given in the verse is to give full measure and weight and to abstain from causing loss to them by holding back what is their due.

In the first part of the verse, the particular crime of under-measuring or under-weighing in buying and selling was prohibited. Later, by saying: لَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ (and do not make people short of their things), the prohibition was generalized. Now the prohibition applies to all kinds of decreasing, slicing, under-cutting or short-changing of rights - whether related to property, or honour, or something else. (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ)

From here we know that the way it is forbidden to give less than due while weighing and measuring, similarly, forbidden is any cutting back on the human rights of other people. Acts like attacking someone's honour, not giving due respect to someone according to his legiti-

mate station, showing shortcoming in obeying those the showing of obedience to whom is necessary and failing to respect those who must compulsorily and duly be respected are included under the purview of the crime which used to be committed by the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام. During his famous *Khuṭbah* of the Last *Hajj*, when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم declared that the honour of people is as worthy of being respected and defended as their blood is, stands as a broader confirmation of this view.

All these things are included under the words: مُطَفِّفِينَ (*muṭaffifīn*) and: تَطَفُّفٍ (*taṭfīf*) wherever mentioned in the Qur'an. Sayyidnā Fārūq al-A'zam رضى الله عنه saw a person making his Rukū' and Sajdah in a hurry. He said: قَدْ طَفَّفْتِ (that is, you are guilty of measuring and weighing short -Mu'atta Imām Mālik). By saying so, he meant that the person had not fulfilled the right of Ṣalāh as it was due. Thus, in this report, the shortcoming of not fulfilling the right of Ṣalāh as due has been referred to by the word: تَطَفُّفٍ (*taṭfīf*: measuring and weighing short).

At the end of the verse, it was said: وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا (and do not make mischief on the earth after it has been set in order). This sentence has also appeared earlier in this Sūrah Al-A'raf (for details, please see comments under verse 56) where it was said that the physical betterment of conditions on the earth depends on utilizing things properly - as and where due, respecting limits and maintaining moderation, equity and justice; and spiritual betterment depends on relationship with Allah and obedience to His commands. As for the opposite of it, that is, physical and spiritual disorder on earth, it shows up when these principles are compromised or abandoned. The people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام had done exactly this. They had totally abandoned these principles because of which earth had become a hotbed of physical and spiritual disorder. That is why they were advised to abstain from such deeds which would serve as corrupting influence for the whole earth.

Then, it was said: ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (This is good for you, if you are believers). The sense is that should they repent and retract from their evil doings, it has nothing but good waiting for them in their present life as well as in the life to come. As for the prosperity and success in the life to come is concerned, it is obvious that it depends on

one's obedience to what Allah has commanded us to do. Then, as for success in the present world, we can say once people find out that there is someone who is honest in weights and measures and is particular about all other rights of his clients, his credit and goodwill will become established in the market and his business will increase in volume and reliability.

Determining the meaning of the statement - 'Do not sit in every path threatening and preventing people from the path of Allah' - in verse 86, some commentators have said that both sentences carry the same sense since these people stopped and threatened those who came to Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام. This they were ordered not to do.

Others have said that these crimes committed by them were two separate crimes. They sat on thoroughfares, looted and snatched things, and also prevented people from believing in Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام. Thus, the first sentence describes the first crime while the second sentence describes the other. The later view has been relied upon in Tafsīr Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ and elsewhere too. Also included under the purview of this command against looting and snatching are checkpoints set up on thoroughfares to realize impermissible taxes against the provisions of the Shari'ah.

'Allāmah Al-Qurtubī has said that those who sit on thoroughfares and make people pay undue taxes against the provisions of the Shari'ah, they too are criminals like the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام - rather, more oppressive and tyrannical than they were.

After that it was said: وَتَبَغُّونَهَا عِوَجًا (and seeking a twist in it), that is, these people are always on the lookout for the opportunity to find something in the way of Allah which they could twist, turn and misrepresent and come up with their roster of doubts and objections through which they could try to wean people away from the true religion.

In the last sentence of verse 86, it was said: وَادْكُرُوا إِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيلًا فَكَثَرَكُمْ وَأَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (And remember the time when you were few, then He increased you in number. And look, how was the fate of mischief makers). The twin aspects of persuasion and intimidation were employed to warn these people. The first was persuasion when they were re-

mindful of the blessing of Allah who increased their insignificant numbers to become a large nation, or changed their economic weakness into need-free financial strength. Then, to chasten them through intimidation, it was said that they could do much better if they had a look at the sad end of peoples who had engineered disorder on the earth. The peoples of Nūh, 'Ād, Thamūd and Lūṭ were examples of so many different punishments, which should help them understand their own situation and make the correction needed.

In the last verse (87), an answer has been given to scruples of these people about the division in their ranks after some of them believed in the call of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام while others kept rejecting him. But, there was no difference between them outwardly. Both groups were living comfortably. If being a disbeliever or denier would have been a crime, the criminal would have been punished. To answer that doubt, it was said: فَاصْبِرُوا حَتَّىٰ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَنَا that is, do not make haste. Allah Ta'ālā is Forbearing and Merciful. He gives respite to wrongdoers. It is only when they become absolutely wicked and high-handed that the decree of Allah comes into action. The state in which they were was similar. If they remained sticking to their denial, the time was not far when the decisive punishment will overtake the deniers.

Verses 88 - 93

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يَشْعِيبُ
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَوْمِنَا أَوْ لَنَعُودَنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَا قَالَ أَوْ
لَوْ كُنَّا كُرْهِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾ قَدْ افْتَرَيْنَا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا إِنْ عُدْنَا فِي
مِلَّتِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ نَجَّيْنَا اللَّهُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَعُودَ
فِيهَا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَسِعَ رَبُّنَا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا
عَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا رَبُّنَا افْتَحْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ قَوْمِنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَنْتَ
خَيْرُ الْفَاتِحِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾ وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَئِن
اتَّبَعْتُمْ شُعَيْبًا إِنَّكُمْ إِذًا لَخٰسِرُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾ فَأَخَذْتَهُمُ الرِّجْفَ
فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جُثَمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَانُوا

لَمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا شَعِيبًا كَانُوا هُمُ الْخٰسِرِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾
 فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يٰ قَوْمِ لَقَدْ اَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسٰلَتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ
 لَكُمْ فَكَيْفَ اٰسٰى عَلٰى قَوْمٍ كٰفِرِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

The chiefs of his people, who were arrogant, said, "O Shu'aib, we will expel you and those who believe with you from our town, or you shall have to turn to our faith." He said, "Even if we hate it? [88] We will be forging a lie against Allah, if we turn to your faith after Allah has saved us from it. And it is not for us that we turn to it unless Allah, our Lord, so wills. Our Lord encompasses everything with His knowledge. In Allah we place our trust. Our Lord, decide between us and our people, with truth, and You are the best of all judges." [89]

And the chiefs of his people who disbelieved said, "If you are to follow Shu'aib, then you are sure losers." [90]

So, the earthquake seized them, and they were (found dead) in their homes fallen on their knees. [91] Those who belied Shu'aib are as if they never dwelt there. Those who belied Shu'aib, they were themselves the losers. [92]

So, he turned away from them and said, "O my people, I have surely delivered to you the message of my Lord, and wished your betterment. How, then, should I grieve over a disbelieving people?" [93]

Commentary

When the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام told him: Had you been on the side of truth, believers in you would have been prospering and non-believers in you would have been under punishment. But, what is actually happening is that both parties have come out equal and living a comfortable life. With this incongruity in sight, how can we take you to be true? Thereupon, the answer that Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام gave was: Do not make haste. The time is near when Allah Ta'ālā will decide the case between the two of them. Not convinced by his answer, the arrogant chiefs of those people said what is always said by oppressive practitioners of arrogance. They said: O Shu'aib, ei-

ther you and the rest of your believers return to the fold of our faith, or else, we shall throw you out of our hometown.

As for the return of ' the rest of believers in Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام to the fold of their old faith' is concerned, it is something which can be understood, for all of them were a part of the faith and way of the disbelievers. It was only later that they had embraced Islam. But, the case of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام was different. He had never followed their false faith and way even for a day - nor can a prophet of Allah Ta'ālā ever follow a faith which is counter to pure monotheism. Why then would they be asking him to return to their faith? Perhaps, it was because Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام - before prophethood was bestowed on him - would maintain silence over their false sayings and doings and continued living among the people as one of them. Because of this, his disbelieving people took Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام too as one of the rest, a fellow-traveller and votary of their faith. It was only after he gave his call of true 'Imān that they discovered that his faith or religion was different from their own. Then, this led them to conclude that he had turned away from their old faith. About their warning that he must return to their old faith, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام said: *أَوَلَمْ نَكُنَّا نُرْمِزُكُمْ* : It means: Are you trying to say that we should return to the fold of your faith despite that we do not like it and consider it to be false? This is a manner of saying that it can never be.

In the second verse (89), Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام said to his people: Allah Ta'ālā saved us from your false faith. Now if we were to return to your faith, this would amount to a false and grim accusation by us against Allah Ta'ālā.

First of all giving *Kufr* and *Shirk* the status of faith by itself means that they have been commanded by Allah Ta'ālā - which is forging a lie against Him. In addition to that, after having believed in the revealed Truth (Imān) and after having its knowledge and insight, a return to *Kufr* (disbelief) would amount to saying that the first way was false and erroneous while the true and correct way was that which has been adopted later. As obvious, this is a compounded lie and accusation - that the true (*Haqq*) was taken to be false (*Bāṭil*) and vice versa, the *Bāṭil* to be *Haqq*.

There was a certain flavour of claim or assertion in this saying of

Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام - that we can never return to your religion again. Making such a claim is, at least outwardly, contrary to the spirit of self-less submission a true servant of Allah is supposed to have (*'abdiyyah*). It does not behove those who are close to the presence of Allah and those who have come to know Him. Therefore, he said: مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نَعُودَ فِيهَا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا، وَسِعَ رَبُّنَا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا، عَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا (And it is not for us that we turn to it unless Allah, our Lord, so wills. Our Lord encompasses everything with His knowledge. In Allah we place our trust).

This statement is a mirror of his humility (*Ijz*), an assertion of trust in Allah (*Tawakkul*) and a confident attitude of resigning matters to Him (*Tafwīd*). These are master virtues of prophets. They amount to saying: What are we and how can we claim to do something or stay away from it? To be able to do something good and to succeed in staying away from evil is nothing but the grace of Allah Ta'ālā - as said by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم:

لَوْلَا اللَّهُ مَا اهْتَدَيْنَا وَلَا تَصَدَّقْنَا وَلَا صَلَّيْنَا

Had there not been the grace of Allah Ta'ālā, we would have not been guided right, nor been able to give in charity, nor to make Ṣalāh.

It was due to this quality of trusting in Allah alone that when, after having talked to the arrogant chiefs of the people, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام realized that nothing seems to move these people in any manner whatsoever, he stopped addressing them and made the following *Du'a'* (prayer) to Allah Ta'ālā: رَبَّنَا اقْضُ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ قَوْمِنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْفَاتِحِينَ (Our Lord, decide between us and our people, with truth, and You are the best of all judges). Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه has said that the word: فَتَحَ (*fathḥ*) means 'decide' at this place. That is how the word: فَاتِحٍ (*fatih*) takes the sense of Qaḍī or judge.

And in reality, through these words, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام had prayed for the destruction of the disbelievers from among his people - which was answered by Allah Ta'ālā when they were destroyed by an earthquake.

Reported in the third verse (90) is a misleading statement of the arrogant chiefs of the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام which they made while talking among themselves, or said that to their followers:

that is, 'if you are to follow Shu'aib, then you are sure losers.' (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ from 'Atā')

The account of the punishment of these wicked people was given in the fourth verse (91) in the following words: **فَأَخَذْتَهُمُ الرِّجْفَ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جُثَمِينَ** (So, the earthquake seized them, and they were [found dead] in their homes fallen on their knees).

The punishment of the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام has been identified as earthquake (*Rajfah, Zalzalah*) while in other verses it appears as: **فَأَخَذَهُمُ عَذَابٌ يَوْمَ الظُّلَّةِ** (26:189) which means that they were seized by the punishment of *Yowm az-Zullah*. *Yowm az-Zullah* means day of the shade. It refers to what happened to them when to come on them first was the shade of a deep and thick cloud under which they all assembled. Then, from this very cloud, stones or fire was rained down.

To accodomate and reconcile the sense of the two verses given above, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه has said: First of all, the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام were subjected to such intense heat, as if the door of Hell has been thrown open towards them. This made them suffocate. Shade or water, nothing seemed to work. Driven by heat, they went into basements. They were more hot. With no choice left, they ran from the city into the nearby forest. There, Allah Ta'ālā sent a thick cloud with cool breeze passing underneath. Out of their senses under the impact of heat, they all rushed for refuge under the shade of that cloud. At that time, the whole cloud became a cloud of fire raining on them and also came the earthquake which turned them to ashes. In this manner, the punishments of the earthquake and the shade had simultaneously converged on these people. (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ)

Some commentators have said that it is also possible that the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام were split in different groups or sections where some were hit by the earthquake while others were destroyed by the punishment of the shade.

In verse 92, the fate of the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام has been cited as a lesson - which is the real purpose behind the description of this event. It was said: **الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا** (Those who belied Shu'aib are as if they never dwelt there). One of the meanings of the

word: غِيًى (*ghinā*) is to live at some place in peace and comfort. At this place, this is the meaning intended. The sense of the sentence is that the homes where they lived in peace and comfort, turned so deserted after this punishment as if peace and comfort had never existed there. Then, it was said: الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَبًا كَانُوا هُمُ الْخٰسِرِينَ (Those who belied Shu'aib were themselves the losers). The hint given is that these were the people threatening to throw Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام and his believing companions out from their city, but, in the end, the loss hit none but them.

In the sixth (93) verse, it was said: فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ (So, he turned away from them). It means that, with punishment for his people in sight, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام and his believing companions moved away from there. The majority of commentators says that these blessed souls left this place for Makkah al-Mu'azzamah where they stayed till the end.

It was his total disappointment with his people neck-deep in disobedience and contumacy which prompted him to pray that they be chastened. But, when the actual punishment came as a result of it, his heart pinched because of his prophetic concern and affection for them. Then, it was for the peace of his own heart that he said addressing his people: 'O my people, I have surely delivered to you the messages of my Lord, and wished you betterment. How, then, should I grieve over a disbelieving people?'

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