

18. And verily did those ever before them cry lies;
So how was My reproof!

وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿١٨﴾

- ***Wa laqad kadhdhab***

- the *waw* that begins this verse is *waw al hal* or the “and” conjunctive of circumstance
- the verse is an *iltifat* or shift of focus from Allah speaking to people (second person- *khitab*) in the previous 5 verses to speaking about people (in the third person-*ghayba*)
- namely as if saying, how should all you feel safe while those ever before them cry lies?
- *lam* in *laqad*: Allah swearing by Himself; also emphasises the unspeakable power of the end of the *aya*: “By Allah, how was My reproof!”; it joins both clauses and evokes Allah’s total and complete dismissal, despising, disregard, and disdain and forsaking of these despicable criminals

- ***Min qalblihim***

- the whole sweep; indicates generality or *ta‘mim*
- more frequently in the Quran, *min qabl* refers to the very recent past, but here it is for *ta‘mim*
- clarifying and stating the obvious nuance that this is an accepted course (*ma‘luf*) to hearers
- it is also as if to say, “everybody knows.”

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- ***Fa kayf kana nakir***

- how was my censure or blame or rebuke

- *nakir* is a rebuke in Arabic that is of two kinds

- 1) that of words

- 2) that of deeds, which is what is meant here

- so Allah destroyed previous peoples as a condemnatory reproof for what they were doing. The rhetorical question at the verse's end has a purpose, and it is to evoke horror and shock (*tahwil wa fadha'a*)

- Allah did not mention them by name or what He did to them specifically

- When someone is disgusted with someone, they turn away from them, so He doesn't even mention them in the second part of the question as a dismissive, despising forsaking of these criminals to the horrific fate He had warned them of by sending them messengers whom they scoffed and laughed at and refused to accept

19. Or can they not have seen the birds high above them;
With soaring wings spread wide abreast,
or enfolded momentarily in:
Naught keeps them aloft but the All-merciful;
Verily He perceives everything in every single way.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الطَّيْرِ فَوْقَهُمْ صَافَّاتٍ وَيَقْبِضْنَ مَا يُمَسِّكُهُنَّ إِلَّا الرَّحْمَنُ
إِنَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١٩﴾

- After clarifying that He created them and the earth for the believers, then that they have believed and thus won safety from His wrath, and reminded them of what He did to previous peoples who refused belief, so that they might reach their own conclusions
- Here Allah is reminding them through a present example of His omnipotent power, the power to keep birds aloft in the sky, and the power to suspend and withhold back His punishment from those who believe and obey
- **Yaraw**
 - observe and comprehend with full knowledge of what one sees
- **Ila al-tayr**
 - *tayr* is the plural of *ta'ir*, bird; the plural denotes the entire genus
- **Fawqahum**
 - *hal* or adverbial of circumstance, applying to the birds
 - *min* has been omitted before *fawqahum* because *min fawq* means just above. It makes the physical descriptions closer. *Fawqahum* alone means the entire empyrean: the whole loft in the sky considered in its magnificent hugeness
 - the whole lofty sky has been subjected to them by the omnipotence of Allah, to be the sphere in which the birds move in any direction that they may choose
 - *fawqahum* alone denotes illimitable height

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- **Safatin**

- their wings are spread out to their full so that the forepart *saff* is an active participle: the doer of the action; a noun
- their wings are spread out to their full reach so that the forepart of their wings are like lines
- the perspective/view is each particular bird and not the birds in formation; bird by bird and not a reference to their flying in formation

- **Yaqbidn**

- verb
- each bird takes its wings in momentarily, gaining strength to again spread them out to soar
- soaring is indicated by *saffat*, an active participle (doer) whose soaring wings as a nominal form indicates that this is the steady state
- *yaqbidn* in the imperfect form of the present verb implies that the former straight wing soaring is the predominant ongoing state (*thabit*) while folding them is the exception
- soaring is referred to by the substantive active participle, something concrete, while drawing the wings in is denoted by the verb to indicate the spells of the steady state

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• *Ma yumsikhunna*

– the verb *amsaka* means to protect and preserve something, meaning from falling down to earth

– the Ulama say that this protection by Allah is through the means He has created in their tissue. Feathers are also miraculously complex. They also have hollow, aerodynamic bones and other means by which flight is a matter of course for them. These are part of the laws of nature, which Allah alone governs

– Allah does as He wills, and Effecting His will does not depend on either cause or effect. Causes are connected with effects conventionally and can suspend this convention at any time. Allah has connected flight with means that He facilitated for birds, such as the specific gravity of the atmosphere, the locomotive system of the birds, their feeding, energy, consciousness, feathers, and bones, aerodynamics, wind, tide, magnetism, and other relations. Allah alone has arranged and combined all of these in the phenomenon of flight

– in this world, Allah's *tajali* is manifest through His *hikma*: effects. In the next world, Allah's *qudra* will be manifest. You just wish for something in Janna and it will appear

• *Ila al-Rahman*

– All of it is of Allah's mighty mercy

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- ***Innahu bi-kuli shay'in basir***

- refers to perception rather than sight
- the ulama say that *basir* does not literally mean vision, because Allah doesn't have body parts. Rather, it refers to His divine knowledge and insight which can bring forth anything from infinite complexities of causes and effects, relations, factors, conditions, times, positions, and places exactly as He intends because He knows everything
- technological or taxonomic explanations of how birds fly limps way behind the realities. It still remains a miracle
- Muhiy al-Din Ibn al-Arabi used to deny the word *ilm*, meaning technological explanations, stating that they only tell us how. they don't tell what. He considered *ilm* to only be the Quran and sunna

20. Or who is this to be a fighting legion at your aid,
short of the All-merciful?
Disbelievers are but in pure delusion.

أَمَّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي هُوَ جُنْدٌ لَكُمْ
يَنْصُرُكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ الرَّحْمَنِ إِنِ الْكَافِرُونَ إِلَّا فِي غُرُورٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

- We have to cast a backward glance
- In verse 15, Allah speaks about subjecting the earth
- Then in 16 and 17, He has threatened you with punishment therein
- In verse 18, He affirmed His power to do so by examples of those before
- Then in 19, He affirmed His power to uphold birds in flight, and therefore His power to keep back the punishment from you
- Here in 20, Allah is asking are there any of your gods capable of lifting the chastisement if Allah wants to send it down on you? Or can they aid you to victory or give you providence?

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• **Jundun**

– plural of *jund*

– fighting force to aid; a large force that has been gathered to aid in battle; solid, united, and of one common mind and purpose

– this is what the fighting tribes represented in Arabia

• **Min uni al-Rahman**

– this doesn't just mean "other than Allah"; *dun* means on this side or below. It means anything short of Allah

– the name al-Rahman has been used to state that none can keep back the chastisement but Allah alone through His mercy

• **Inna**

– a negatory particle

• **al-Kafirun**

– denotes all unbelievers, not just the ones in the time of the Prophet; mentioned as if in consequence to the first part of the *aya*; disbelievers are in pure delusion.

– the explicit reference to the *kafirun* by name is what they call in *balagha* (rhetoric) *idhhar fi marwidi' al-idmar*: explicitly named reference when a pronoun would do

– it is to make it clear what their crime is and censure them for their disbelief

– it affirms that the reason for delusion is their very unbelief and to generalise this consequence to all who are unbelievers

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- ***Illa fi ghurur***

- *illa* is one of the most powerful negations in the Arabic language
- indefinite of *ghurur* implies hopelessly in delusion; that which leads somebody to seek something from whence it cannot be found, so one is fooled by it and deceived

21. Or who is this to provide for you,
should He withhold His provision?
Rather they plunge ever deeper in haughty wrong,
and bolting frightened away from the Truth.

أَمَّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُكُمْ إِنْ أَمْسَكَ رِزْقَهُ، بَلْ لَّجُؤًا فِي عُتُوٍّ وَنُفُورٍ ﴿٢١﴾

- ***Aman hadha al-ladhi***

- again, Allah challenges them a second time to something they cannot answer
- Alusi finds that verse 20's challenge, "who is this to be a fighting legion..." harkens back to verse 16's threat "lest He make the earth give way..." for which a fighting force would be at a complete loss to do anything about if Allah made the earth swallow them.
- verse 21's challenge of "who should provide for should Allah withhold His provision" harkens back to verse 17's threat, "lest He loose against you a fatal gale..." i.e instead of the rain that supplies everything for you

- ***Rizqahu***

- pronominal suffix returns to Allah; His *rizq* includes rainwater and oxygen and every other provision that He provides

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- **Bal lajju**

- Here is as if in answer to the question: the prospect of Allah's withholding provisions from them having any effect on them. Instead, they plunge ever deeper into haughty wrong
 - there's a shift in attention (*iltifat*) in mid *aya* from *khitab* (second person) to *ghayba* (third person). From speaking to them to speaking about them deliberately denotes Allah turning away from them in disdain to repay them for their turning away from Him
 - past tense of *lajju* denotes their being completely given over to this attribute and stubbornly persisting in it.
- Do they gain anything from being warned that Allah can withhold His provisions? No, but rather they plunge ever deeper in stubbornness and insist on remaining as they are.
- *lajjaj* is long, stubborn, inveterate persistence (*tamadl*) in wilful, obstinate, pig-headed refusal (*inad*). It means to go into something. Its distribution in the Quran is completely negative; to the nethermost depths of degradation and *isyan*
 - it means they go to the very depths of the *bātil*.
 - **reminder**: Somebody who persists in a minor sin over and over and over again, it becomes a *kabira* because it mocks Allah's mercy

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- ***Fi utuwīn***

- haughty wrong; they even increased in haughty wrong; likewise, they were always bolting away from the truth.
- related to *itaya*: haughty aloofness from obedience and worship to Allah, until hardened into a hardcore *batil*, just as in old age one reaches withered dryness
- these criminals have likewise become so dried and hardened in insolence and evil that they have reached a state of human degradation beyond hope of return, and they act like it
- the *fi* means emersion in this attribute and never giving up

- ***Nufur***

- the flight of a creature as from a predator
- the criminals referred to are likened to animals startled away and frightened so that they increase in remoteness from the truth and then fleeing from it

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- The stunning supreme succinctness of how loaded all the terms of the Quran are in meaning and heuristic fertility teaches us how forcefully the original message must have struck those who first heard it, and this is part of its inimitable immortal miracle (*ijaz*)
- What we take away from this verse is the lethal power of *hawaa*, which means stubborn folly, obsession, addiction, and impulse faithfully followed. This is the basic drive of the *nafs* that entices evil
- Allah is warning us against *hawaa* and out of being merely reactionary against something

22. So is he who stumbles along on his face better guided or he who walks upright on an exalted straight path?

أَفَمَنْ يَمْشِي مُكِبًّا عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ أَهْدَىٰ أَمَّنْ يَمْشِي
سَوِيًّا عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

- Since Allah has mentioned the state of those of *iman* and those of *kufr*, He details what the distinction further entails
- ***Afaman***
 - why is there a *fa*? by way of saying that, “then is this one like that one?”
 - *fa al-tartib*, *Fa* of a premise and a conclusion; *fa* of consequence resulting from the previous description of their state
- ***Yamshi mukiban ‘ala wajhihi***
 - keeps falling down and gets up and falls down again. It contains an ellipsis of understood words.
 - Allah omits “who walks on an impassibly twisted, tortured, pot-holed crooked, and broken path (that’s why he keeps falling on his face)”
 - omission makes them more emphatic. There is suspense created by the ellipsis
 - omitted a pair of ellipses that are meant to contrast one group from the other is termed *ihtibak*.
 - the two paths are setting out on one’s journey a *din* that is *batil* or no *din* at all, governed by modern superstitions and urban myths and symbols; or setting out on an exalted straight path offering a divinely inspired clear alternative from Allah and to Allah to the jargon of the present age
- When we’re talking to people about Islam, we should say that Islam presents a clear alternative to the philosophies of the age, not try to fit it in here and fit it in there and make excuses

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سَوِيًّا عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

- ***Yamshi***

- denotes continuity in both the stumbler and the guided
- this is their life journey that they're on: the person always stumbling on the crooked road because he can't see his way; al-Biqā'i also says because he won't look and figure out where he should go; he walks in the hardest places to walk.
- this is the unbeliever who will not perceive the truth and ignores *sirat al mustaqim*
- likewise, the guided knows the truth and can follow the way on which he never falls

- ***Siratin mustaqim***

- straight, exalted and, easy way

23. Say, ‘It is He alone who has raised you forth in stages,
and given you hearing, and eyes, and lucid hearts:
How little thanks you show!’

قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ
لَكُمْ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَرَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

- This verse is to the *kafir*: after the foregoing verses of threats, mentioning the incapacity of man to turn aside the divine wrath, and speaking about the difference in the path of life of the unbeliever and the guided, Allah reminds mankind that He has brought them forth and given them hearing, eyes, and cognisant hearts. Unbelievers have neglected to use these faculties for anything that is beneficial to them
- ***Qul huwa al-ladhi***
 - He alone (*hasr*)
- ***Ansha’ahum***
 - bringing something into being that did not previously exist and raise it and let it grow until it comes to perfection
- ***Ja’ala lakum***
 - *ja’ala* denotes making something come to exist, making it become something, and that the result persists and endures (*thabit*)
 - in the Quran, Allah always makes hearing precede sight because it is more crucial and important in disclosing the *ayat* of the universe.
- ***Absar***
 - plural is used because the eyes focuses on its objects in a number of ways, times, and perspectives. The eye has many parts in tandem to produce an ocular image

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• ***Fu'ad***

- cognisant, thinking, comprehending, and intelligent heart
- the Arabic language has an astonishing wealth of words describing human traits
- hearts that are fiery, luminous, bright, heated, brilliant, and radiant; hearts that Allah has made are keen, insightful, perspicuous, and kindled with thoughts—lucid hearts.
- Allah thereby saying He has given Man everything he needs to know what he should
- in this verse, Allah is blaming people for not using their lucid hearts

• ***Qalilan ma tashkurun***

- *qalilan* stands as the absolute object of the verb (maf'ul mutlaq).
- it is more emphatic for its tense-succinct form
- it is made emphatic also by the indefinite and by the *ma* that comes after it
- the idolater who thanks Allah or others aside Him, or the Muslim who is seldom mindful of Allah's blessings upon him, neither of these benefit much by their piteously sparse thanks
- *shukr* is using the blessings Allah has given you for what they were created for
- the unbeliever doesn't use these faculties for what they were created for, stumbles along on his face over the path that he has now chosen.