

Surah 10. Yunus

Asad: For, alas,¹¹⁹ there has never yet been any community that attained to faith [in its entirety,] and thereupon benefited by its faith, except the people of Jonah.¹²⁰ When they came to believe, We removed from them the suffering of disgrace [which otherwise would have befallen them even] in the life of this world, and allowed them to enjoy their life during the time allotted to them.¹²¹

Malik: Was there any town which seeing the scourge, believed, and their belief profited them except the people of Yunus (Jonah)? When they believed, We removed from them the disgraceful scourge and allowed them to enjoy their worldly life for a while.

Pickthall: If only there had been a community (of all those that were destroyed of old) that believed and profited by its belief as did the folk of Jonah. When they believed We drew off from them the torment of disgrace in the life of the world and gave them comfort for a while.

Yusuf Ali: Why was there not a single township (among those We warned) which believed so its Faith should have profited it except the people of Jonah? When they believed We removed from them the Penalty of Ignominy in the life of the Present and permitted them to enjoy (their life) for a while.^{1478 1479}

Transliteration: Falawla k^{an}at qaryatun amanat fanafaAAaha eemanuha illa qawma yoonusa lamma a

manoo kashafna AAanhum AAathaba alkhizyi fee alhayati alddunya wamattaAAanahum ila heenin

Khatab:

If only there had been a society which believed ?before seeing the torment? and, therefore, benefited from its belief, like the people of Jonah.¹ When they believed, We lifted from them the torment of disgrace in this world and allowed them enjoyment for a while.²

Author Comments

119 - The particle law-la ("were it not that" or "were it not for") is sometimes synonymous with hal-la, and could therefore be translated as "why not" ("why was there not...?", etc.). However, neither the interrogative nor the above-mentioned literal rendering would bring out the purport of this passage. Its meaning becomes obvious only if we remember that law-la is - apart from its primary significance - one of the so-called huruf at-tahdid ("particles denoting insistence"). Whenever it is followed by a verb in the future tense, it expresses an urgent exhortation to do a thing; if followed by a verb in the past tense, as in the above case, it implies reproof for one's not having done something that should have been done. There is no idiomatic equivalent in modern English to convey this meaning. The nearest approach to it would be, I believe, the archaic exclamation "alack", expressive of deep sorrow or reproach; but the use of this expression (probably a compound of "ah! lack!" - i.e., loss or misfortune) is ruled out by its obsolescence. Consequently, I am constrained to employ the more current interjection "alas", despite the fact that it does not possess the intensity of the ancient "alack". At any rate, the reader must bear in mind that the passage under consideration, although seemingly phrased in a conditional or an interrogatory form, implies a positive statement: namely - as has been stressed by several classical commentators, and most explicitly by Tabari - the statement that "there has never yet been...", etc.

120 - The Qur'an points out in many places that no prophet has ever been immediately accepted as such and followed by all of his people, and that many a community perished in result of the stubborn refusal, by the majority of its members, to listen to the divine message. The only exception in this respect is said to have been the people of Nineveh, who - after having at first rejected their prophet Jonah, so that "he went off in wrath" (cf. [21:87](#)) - later responded to his call in unison, and were saved. For the story of Jonah, see {21:87-88} and {37:139-148}, as well as the corresponding notes; a fuller narrative, which does not conflict with the Qur'anic references, is forthcoming from the Bible (The Book of Jonah). In the context of the passage which we are now considering, the mention of Jonah's people - who alone among the communities of the past heeded their prophet before it was too late - is meant to warn the hearers and readers of the Qur'an that a deliberate rejection of its message by "those against whom God's word [of judgment] has come true" (see verse {96}) is bound to result in their spiritual doom and, consequently, in grievous suffering in the life to come.

121 - Lit., "for a time", i.e., their natural life-span (Manar XI, 483).

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Initially, the people of Jonah rejected his message. When he was told they would be punished after three days for their defiance, he left his city without Allah's permission before its destruction. Jonah's people became convinced that they were going to be destroyed when he left them and they saw signs of the imminent torment, so they felt remorseful and cried out for forgiveness before the coming of the punishment. Therefore, Allah accepted their repentance and the torment was retracted.

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i.e., until the end of their term.

1478 - Allah in His infinite Mercy points out the contumacy of Sin as a warning, and the exceptional case of Nineveh and its Prophet Jonah is alluded to. The story of Jonah is told in xxxvii. 139-148, which would be an appropriate place for further comments. Here it is sufficient to note that Nineveh was a very ancient town which is now no longer on the map. Its site is believed to be marked by the two mounds on the left bank of the Tigris, opposite the flourishing city of Mosul on the right bank, about 230 miles north-north-west of Bagdad. One of the mounds bears the name of "the Tomb of Nabi Yunus." Archeologists have not yet fully explored its antiquities. But it is clear that it was a very old Sumerian town, perhaps older than 3500 B.C. It became the capital of Assyria. The first Assyrian Empire under Shalmaneser I, about 1300 B.C., became the supreme power in Western Asia. Babylon, whose tributary Assyria had formerly been, now became tributary to Assyria. The second Assyrian Empire arose about 745 B.C., and Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) beautified the town with many Public Works. It was destroyed by the Scythians (so-called Medes) in 612 B.C. If the date of Jonah were assumed to be about 800 B.C., it would be between the First and the Second Assyrian Empire; when the City was nearly destroyed for its sins, but on account of its repentance was given a new lease of glorious life in the Second Empire.

1479 - The point of the allusion here may be thus explained. Nineveh was a great and glorious City. But it became, like Babylon, a city of sin. Allah sent the prophet Yunus (Jonah) to warn it. Full of iniquities though it was, it listened to the warning, perhaps in the person of a few just men. For their sakes, the All-Merciful Allah spared it, and gave it a new lease of glorious life. According to the chronology in the last note the new lease would be for about two centuries, after which it perished completely for its sins and abominations. Note that its new lease of life was for its collective life as a City, the life of the Present, i.e., of this World. It does not mean that individual sinners escaped the spiritual consequences of their sin, unless they individually repented and obtained Allah's mercy and forgiveness.

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