

Surah 2. Al-Baqara

Asad: AND LO!²¹ Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it."²² They said: "Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood - whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?" [God] answered: "Verily, I know that which you do not know."

Malik: Note that occasion, when your Rabb said to the angels: I am going to place a vicegerent on earth. The angels said: "Will You place there one who will make mischief and shed blood while we sing Your praises and glorify Your name?" Allah said: "I know what you know not."

Pickthall: And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: wilt Thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not.

Yusuf Ali: Behold thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said "Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not."⁴⁷

Transliteration: Waith qala rabbuka lilmalaikati innee jaAAilun fee alardi khaleefatan qaloo atajAAalu feeha man yufsidu feeha wayasfiku alddimaa wanahnu nusabbihu bihamdika wanuqaddisu laka qala innee aAAlamu ma la taAAlamoona

Khatab:

?Remember? when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to place a successive ?human? authority on earth." They asked ?Allah?, "Will You place in it someone who will spread corruption there and shed blood while we glorify Your praises and proclaim Your holiness?" Allah responded, "I know what you do not know."¹

Author Comments

21 - The interjection "lo" seems to be the only adequate rendering, in this context, of the particle idh, which is usually - and without sufficient attention to its varying uses in Arabic construction - translated as "when". Although the latter rendering is often justified, idh is also used to indicate "the sudden, or unexpected, occurrence of a thing" (cf. Lane I, 39), or a sudden turn in the discourse. The subsequent allegory, relating as it does to the faculty of reason implanted in man, is logically connected with the preceding passages.

22 - Lit., "establish on earth a successor" or a "vice-gerent". The term khalifah - derived from the verb khalafa, "he succeeded [another]" - is used in this allegory to denote man's rightful supremacy on earth, which is most suitably rendered by the expression "he shall inherit the earth" (in the sense of being given possession of it). See also [6:165](#), [27:62](#) and [35:39](#), where all human beings are spoken of as khala'if al-ard.

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Allah knew that there would be many righteous people who would do good, make peace, and stand up for justice. Since humans have free choice, whoever chooses to believe and do good is better in the sight of Allah than all other beings, and whoever chooses to disbelieve and do evil is worse than all other beings. See 98:6-8.

47 - It would seem that the angels, though holy and pure, and endowed with power from God, yet represented only one side of Creation. We may imagine them without passion or emotion, of which the highest flower is love. If man was to be endowed with emotions, those emotions would lead him to the highest and drag him to the lowest. The power of will or choosing would have to go with them, in order that man might steer his own bark. This power of will (when used aright) gave him to some extent a mastery over his own fortunes and over nature, thus bringing him nearer to the God-like nature which has supreme mastery and will. We may suppose the angels had no independent wills of their own; their perfection in other ways reflected God's perfection but could not raise them to the dignity of vicegerency. The perfect vicegerent is he who has the power of initiative himself, but whose independent action always reflects perfectly the will of his Principal. The distinction is expressed by Shakespeare (Sonnet 94) in those fine lines: "They are the lords and owners of their faces. Others but stewards of their excellence." The angels in their one-sidedness saw only the mischief consequent on the misuse of the emotional nature by man; perhaps they also, being without emotions, did not understand the whole of God's nature, which gives and asks for love. In humility and true devotion to God, they remonstrate; we must not imagine the least tinge of jealousy, as they are without emotion. This mystery of love being above them, they are told that they do not know and they acknowledge (in ii. 32 below) not their fault (for there is no question of fault) but their imperfection of knowledge. At the same time, the matter is brought home to them when the actual capacities of man are shown to them (ii. 31, 33).

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