

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF SŪRATUL-KAWTHAR: A PANACEA FOR TEMPTATION AND HOSTILITY

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Abstract

Life is characterized with ups and downs which at times make one feel dejected and humiliated. As a result, enemies feel rejoiced and celebrated. The Glorious Qur'ān provides a glimpse of the life of the Prophet and the course of his mission in the early period at Makkah in different passages of the scripture. This particular chapter exclusively concerns the Prophet as it cheers him up and assures him of happier prospects in his struggle. The messages contained in the chapter cannot be ignored by contemporary Muslims striving to occupy one position or the other be it socio-political, economic-legal and religious-intellectual. The paper attempts to examine the issues of abundance with a view to bringing to focus the Muslims' understanding on the word. Efforts shall be made to analyze the chapter with the opinions of some Qur'ānic exegetes with a view to bringing to focus ways and manners on how to gain assurance and conquer rumor mongers and ill-hearted people. Document review method is adopted. Findings from the study revealed that absolute faith in Allāh, strong determination to abide by His, good deeds to fellow human beings and fervent prayers are the ingredients that Islam recommends as amour against trial. It is discovered that the study would prove invaluable, especially for those who intend to study phenomena for solving human ever increasing problems.

Keywords: Exegetical study, Kawthar, Panacea, Temptation and Hostility

Introduction

Islām encourages Muslims to always rely on Allāh, the ever provider of succor, in all their endeavours. There is no gain saying the fact that in any effort aimed at building a perfect society, mockery and taunt must be eschewed. Islām occupies a unique position for a perfect and complete way of life. Its teachings have positively affected the modern day thoughts in general and contemporary ways of addressing people in particular. The verses are explicit on instructions and the need to examine their relevance and significance to people cannot be undermined with a view to solely putting trust in Allāh and rendering selfless services to the society.

In the light of this, the paper is divided into eight sections. The first section serves as an introduction to the study. The second section traces the definition of *Kawthar* while the third section discusses concept of temptation. The fourth section serves as the translation of its text while the fifth section traces its historical background and the sixth section examines the circumstances surrounding its revelation. The seventh section renders its commentary and the eighth section conclude that Muslim should learn from this chapter not rejoice at his neighbour's distress or misfortune even if he does not agree with him.

Definition of *Kawthar* from Linguistic Background

In Arab-Islamic culture, things are usually known by their antithesis. Thus the Arabic word for abundance (*al-Kawthar*), which is derived from the trilateral verb root *k-th-r* (*Kathara*) that means, according to Ibn Manzūr (2009:3842), large quantity, great number, multitude, abundance, copiousness, numerousness, plenty and unlimited. Its opposite is *al-qillah* which variously means littleness, fewness, smallness, triviality, insignificance, paucity and scantiness.

The full meaning of the word *kawthar*, as used here, cannot perhaps be expressed in one word in any language of the world. It is an intensive form of the noun *kathrat* which literally means abundance, but the context in which it has been used does not give the meaning of mere abundance but abundance of good, of spiritual benefits and blessings, and of such abundance which is unbounded and limitless, and it does not imply any one good or benefit or blessing but abundance of countless benefits and blessings (Al-Mālikī, n.d:306).

This abundance entails the matchless moral qualities which the Holy Prophet was blessed with. It also includes the great blessings of Prophet-hood and the Glorious Qur'ān as well as the knowledge and wisdom that were granted to him. It comprises the blessing of *Tawhīd* and also of such a system of life, whose simple and intelligible, rational, natural and comprehensive principles has the potential to spread throughout the world and of continuing to spread forever afterwards (Qutb, 1985:321).

According to Maududi (2013:572-573), it encompasses the blessing of the exaltation of renown because of which the holy Prophet's blessed name continues to be exalted throughout the world and will continue to be exalted till Resurrection. It includes the blessing that by his preaching eventually such a world-wide community came into being, which became the standard bearer of truth in the world forever, which can claim to have produced the greatest number of the pious, virtuous and noble character men in any one nation.

Kawthar also implies two other great blessings which Allah will bestow on him in the Hereafter. We had no means of knowing these, therefore, the Prophet (upon whom be peace) himself gave us news of them, and told us that *Kawthar* also implies them. The first is the Fountain of *Kawthar* which he will be granted on the Day of Resurrection in the Plain of Assembly. The second is the River of *Kawthar* which he will be granted in the Paradise (Al-Qurṭubī, 1994:192). On both such a large number of the Traditions have been reported from him through a large number of the reporters that there remains no doubt about their authenticity.

Concept of Temptation

The word "temptation" is exposed to diverse shades of meaning which are not too far from one another in essence. Deffon (1995:11-12) defines it as "tempting or being tempted"; thing that attracts, attractive course". Homby (1991:1323) defines it in identical manner. In a similar vein, Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines temptation as "act of tempting; state of being tempted; that which tempts; enticement to evil; trial" (Kirkpatrick, 1983:1331). The last connotations, namely "enticement to evil" and "trial" are not mentioned directly in the two dictionaries earlier referred to. However, the root of the word i.e. tempt is defined as "persuade somebody to do something wrong or unwise, act rashly; take a risk" (Homby, 1991:1323). Similarly, it is defined as "to put to trial; to test; to try or tend to persuade, especially to evil; to entice." As regard to the

active participle of tempting, i.e. the tempter, the three dictionaries agree that the tempter is the devil or Satan (Homby, 1323& Kirkpatrick, 1331).

From the above, it is clear that trial means enticement to do a wrong thing, a test, and a trial. For our purpose in this paper, we shall be referring to these connotations wherever we use the term. It is true that the chief tempter is Satan (*Shayṭān*) who is also called Iblīs in Islamic circles. He has aides among spirits, men and women (Qur'ān 114:1-6).

This leads us to the question of the identity of Satan. He is the devil equated to *Esu* in Yoruba (Dopamu, 1986). He is called *Shedan* among the people of Northern part of Nigeria. In English, he is known as “the supreme spirit of evil.” He is also referred to as “the chief fallen angel; the chief evil spirit; adversary of God and tempter of men” (Kirkpatrick, 1991:1149).

In Islamic theology, belief in angels of God is one the articles of faith. These angels, whose numerical strength is known only to Allah, are winged spiritual beings, created by God from light for His service. They are capable of changing to any form but have no free-will. They obey wholeheartedly God's command without any hesitation. (Qur'ān 66:6, 33:56, 82:10-12 and 42:5; Abdul, 1974:20-21).

Iblīs used to be among the angels until he disobeyed God when he and other angels were ordered to bow to Adam as a mark of respect on account of his being more knowledgeable than they. (Qur'ān 2:30-34, 7:11; and 15:28-30). Out of arrogance, Iblīs refused to bow to Adam, while the angels did. He boasted that he had been created from fire; he was superior to Adam who was created from clay. He further argued that he was by far senior in age to Adam. Yet, he knew that Adam had an edge over him in knowledge. (Qur'ān 7:11-13 and 17:61).

Having disobeyed God, Iblīs was expelled from the lofty circles of angels and humiliated by God (Qur'ān 7:13-18). He, the devil, asked for one favour from God and that was long life. He begged to be spared till the end of the world, and that was granted. He then vowed to deal ruthlessly with Adam and his children, entice them to evil and attempt to make them perpetually ungrateful to God. (Qur'ān 7:14-17 and 62-63; Hughes, 1964:84).

The Almighty God left him alone but told him that he had no authority over the true pious servants of His. As regards these, God promised to strengthen them with His impregnable Holy Spirit (*Al-Rūḥ al-Quds*) through angelic promptings (Qur'ān 17:65). That showcased the beginning of struggle between good and evil.

It is evident from the above, from the Islamic stand point, that the struggle is between the angels and satanic forces not directly between God and Satan since there is absolutely no basis for equating the Creator (God) to the created (Satan). It is pertinent to take a cursory look at the purpose of life on earth and the inevitable trials.

For a lucid explanation, the following two Qur'ānic injunctions are apposite:

Blessed be He who owns all sovereignty and He has the ability to do all things. He created life and death so as to try you in order to reveal those among you, who will be

most righteous; He is the Mighty, the Forgiving. (Qur'ān 67:1-2)

Do people think that they would be left alone when they say “we have faith (in God), and would not be tested with afflictions? We have indeed tested those who came before them. Allah doubtless knows those who are sincere and knows those who are liars. (Qur'ān 29:2)

From the above verses, it is clear that God did not send man to this world for the fun of it. Man's existence on earth is an avenue of testing his faith, his sense of appreciation to God, his fellow human beings, his ability to resist evil, shun the devil and have a pure, angel inspired heart filled to the brim with God's holy words, thoughts, and pleasure and resolve to always be on the side of truth.

It is true that God always tries His servants in different ways. It is true that when being tried Satan acts as a nuisance to man, trying to lure him to always go the wrong way. It has to be explained here that trials here may mean death, material losses, famine, diseases etc. It may also mean wealth, high position, academic excellence and physical strength. In any condition one finds himself, he can either follow the right path and earn eternal salvation or follow Satan's evil prompting and be doomed. At the end of it all, one's success or failure shall be judged on the basis of his ability or otherwise to resist and shun the devil. Let us look at the translation of the chapter.

Translation of the Text

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

1. Verily, We have granted you (O Muḥammad) *Al-Kawthar* (Abundance).
2. Therefore turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice (to Him only).
3. For he who hates you (O Muḥammad), he will be cut off (from posterity and every good thing in this world and in the Hereafter).

Its Historical Background

The earliest phase of prophet-hood of the Prophet was the most trying conditions – when the whole nation had turned hostile, there was resistance and opposition on every side, and the Prophet and a handful of his companions did not see any remote chance of success – Allah in order to console and encourage him at that time had sent down several verses. In *Sūratu 'd-Duḥā*, it was said:

And surely the later period is better for you than the former period, and soon your Lord shall give you so much that you shall be well pleased (Qur'ān 93:5).

In *Sūratu Alam Nashrah*, it was said:

And We exalted your renown for you verily along with every hardship there is also ease. Indeed, with every hardship there is also ease (Qur'ān 94:4-5).

That is, though the enemies are trying to defame you throughout the country, We, on the contrary, have arranged to exalt your name and fame. That is, you should not be disheartened by the severity of conditions at this time; this period of hardship will soon pass, and the period of success and victory will follow.

Such were the conditions in which Allāh sent down *Sūrat Al-Kawthar* consoled the Prophet as well as foretold the destruction of his opponents. The disbelieving Quraysh, as Zamakhsharī (1993:291) opined, said: “Muḥammad (upon who be Allah’s peace and blessings) is cut off from his community and reduced to a powerless and helpless individual.” According to Ikrimah, when the Prophet was appointed a Prophet, and he began to call the people to Islam, the Quraysh said: Muhammad is cut off from his people as a tree is cut off from its root, which might fall to the ground any moment. When Qāsim died and then ‘Abdullāh, ‘Aṣ bin Wā’il said: “His line has come to an end, now he is *abtar* (cut off from root) (Al-Rāzī,1987:493).

It is related ‘Aṣ bin Wā’il said: “Muḥammad is *abtar*, he has no son to succeed him. When he dies, his memory will perish and you will be rid of him. Abū Jahl also had said similar words on the death of the Prophet’s son, Abdullah. In another tradition, when the second son of the Prophet died, his own uncle, Abū Lahab (whose house was next to his) hastened to the pagans and gave them the “good news” by saying:

Batira Muḥammad-un al-Layl

“Muḥammad has become childless this night, or he is cut off from root
(Maududi, 2013:572-573).

Such were the disturbing conditions under which the chapter was sent down. The Quraysh were angry with him because he worshipped and served only Allah and repudiated their idolatry publicly. For this reason, he was deprived of the rank, esteem and honour that he enjoyed among his people before prophet-hood and was now as cut off from his community.

Circumstances surrounding its revelation

The circumstances surrounding the revelation of a particular Qur’ānic chapter, as Denffer (1983:93) opines, are very germane to its interpretation and understanding due to the fact that they assist in giving the historical situation at the time of the Prophet. Among the people of Quraysh (the Arab tribe which was dominant in Makkah) there were some imprudent folk who viewed the Prophet and his mission with no small degree of antagonism. They would resort to machinations and taunts against him to deter the people from listening to the truth, which he conveyed to them in the form of a divine message (Hitti, 1979: 36-75). Among these disgruntled elements were people like Al-‘Āṣī ibn Wā’il, ‘Uqbah ibn Mu’yat, Abī Lahab, Abū Jahl and others. They used to say about the Prophet that he was a man with no posterity, referring to the early death of his sons. One of them, according to Al-Mālikī (n.d:306), once remarked: “Do not bothered with him; he will die without descendants and that will be the end of his mission.”

In fact, such a trivial and cunning taunt had a wide impact in the Arab society of the time, which set great store by sons. This sharp taunt delighted the enemies of the Prophet and undoubtedly this was a source of depression and irritation to his noble heart. This is carefully depicted in the Glorious Qur’ān thus:

If a good befalls you, it grieves them, but if some evil overtakes you, they rejoice at it. But if you remain patient and become pious, not the least harm will their cunning do to you. Surely, Allah surrounds all that they do (Qur'ān 2:120).

This chapter was therefore revealed, comforting the Prophet and assuring him of the abiding and profuse goodness which Allāh had chosen for him. It affirmed the deprivation and loss awaiting his persecutors.

Its Commentary

The chapter is similar to other chapters such Qur'ān 93 and Qur'ān 94 “The Forenoon” and “Solace” respectively where the Prophet was cheered up and assured of happier prospects in his struggle. Allāh, the Exalted, threatens the enemies of the Prophet with wanton destruction while directs the Prophet to the path of showing appreciation and gratitude.

It also represents a glimpse of the life of the Prophet and the course of his mission in the early period at Makkah. It deals with the plots and insults directed against the Prophet and the Divine message he conveys. The chapter is an instance of Allāh's actual protection of His servant and those who follow the Prophet and believe in Allāh. It is also an instance of Allāh's direct support to the believers in their struggle, supplying them with fortitude, restraint and promise while threatening a terrible fate to their antagonists.

In this way, the chapter symbolizes the reality of guidance, goodness and faith on the one hand and that of terror, evil and disbelief on the other. The former category is one of abundance; profusion and expansive goodness while the latter one of scantiness, shrinking resources and annihilation (Qutb, 1985:322).

Verily, We have granted you (O Muḥammad) *Al-Kawthar* (abundance). The verse itself gives the meaning: Your foolish opponents think that you are ruined and deprived of good things that you enjoyed before Prophet-hood, but the fact is that We have favoured you with unbounded good and countless blessings. Allāh has used *al-Kawthar* for the Prophet against the opposite meaning to the one the impudent folk of Quraysh tried to attach to the Prophet (Maududi, 2013:572-573).

“We have granted you” that which is plentiful, overflowing and rich, unstinting and unending. If anyone wishes to pursue and observe this abundance which Allāh has granted to His Prophet, he would find it wherever he looks and reflects. He would find it in this Qur'ān which was revealed to the Prophet, every chapter of which is a fountain of richness which flows incessantly. He would also find this abundance manifest in the goodness and prosperity which have accrued to the human race as a result of his message, and which reach those who know and believe in him and those who do not.

On the fountain, the Prophet is quoted to have said: this Fountain will be granted to him on the Resurrection Day when there will be the cry of thirst on every side. The Prophet's community will gather together before him at it and will be watered thereby. He himself will be the first to

arrive at it and will occupy the central position. He has said: "This is a Fountain at which my community will assemble on the Resurrection Day (Ibn Kathīr, 1987:598).

About this Fountain, the Prophet has told us that water will be supplied to it from the River *Kawthar* of Paradise. Two channels from Paradise will flow into it and supply water to it (Muslim: *Kitāb al-Faḍāil*). According to another tradition, "A canal from the River *Kawthar* of Paradise will be opened towards this Fountain." (Al-'Aṭār, 2012:2435).

On its description, according to Muḥammad et.al (1989:931), the Prophet said: "its water will be whiter than milk". Other tradition says: "whiter than silver, whiter than snow, cooler than snow, sweeter than honey; the earth of its bed will be more fragrant than musk; the water jugs set at it will be as numerous as the stars in the sky; the one who drinks from it would never thirst; and the one who is deprived of it will never have his thirst satisfied. These things with a little variation in wording have been reported in numerous Aḥādīth.

Concerning it, the Prophet warned the people of his time again and again saying: "after me those from among you who would effect changes in my way, will be removed from the Fountain and will be disallowed to approach it. I shall say: they are my companions, but it will be said: "Don't you know what they did after you? Then, I too shall discard them and tell them to keep away" (Al-Aṭār, 2012: 2436 and Siddioi, 2007:58). This subject too has been expressed in many traditions.

The River *Kawthar* which the Prophet shall be granted in Paradise also has been mentioned in a large number of the traditions. Many traditions have been related on the authority of Anas in which he says that on the occasion of *mi'raj*, the Prophet was taken round Paradise and shown a river on the banks of which there were vaults of pearls or precious stones carved from within; the earth of its bed was of the strong scented musk. He asked Gabriel, or the angel who took him round, what it was. He replied that it was the River *Kawthar*, which Allāh had granted him (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, 6:4964, Siddioi, 2007:54, and Khan, 2007:845).

Again, according to Anas, the Prophet was asked: "What is the *Kawthar*?" He replied: "It is a River which Allāh has granted me in Paradise. Its earth is musk; its water is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey". Another narration, according to Ibn 'Umar says that the Prophet said: "The *Kawthar* is a river in Paradise the banks of which are golden; it flows on pearls and diamonds; its earth smells sweeter than musk; its water is whiter than milk (or snow), cooler than snow and sweeter than honey" (Al-Rāzī, 1987:493-495 and Siddioi, 2007: 56).

"Therefore turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice (to Him only)." Different commentaries have been reported from different scholars. Some of them take the Prayer to mean the five times obligatory prayer. Some take it to imply the prayer of *'Īd al-Adhā*, and some say that it implies the prayer itself. Likewise, the meaning of *wanḥar* and sacrifice according to some scholars is to place the right hand over the left hand and to fold them on the chest in the prayer. Some others are of the opinion that it refers to raising both hands with *Allāhu Akbar* at the commencement of the prayer. Some say that it implies performing the *'Īd al-Adhā* prayer and then offering the animal sacrifice (Ibn Kathīr,1987:598). If the context in which this command has been enjoined, is considered, its meaning clearly seems to be: "O Prophet when your Lord has granted you so

many and so splendid blessing, then you should perform the prayer only for His sake and offer sacrifice only for His sake.”

This command was given in the environment when not only the pagans of Quraysh but the pagans of entire Arabia and the world worshipped their self-made gods and offered sacrifices at their shrines. Therefore, the intention of the command is contrary to the polytheistic practice, you should remain steadfast to your creed. Your prayer is only for Allāh and your sacrifice also is for Him alone (Ibn al-‘Arabī, 1987:457). This command has been said at another place:

Say (O Muḥammad): Verily, my prayer, my sacrifice, my living, and my death are for Allāh, the Lord of the universe. He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims (Qur’ān 6:162-163).

This same meaning has been explained of it by Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Aṭā’, Mujāhid, Ikrimah, Ḥasan Baṣrī, Qatādah and others. This is deducted from the verse that prayer is to be performed first and then offer the sacrifice.

Having assured the Prophet of this munificent gift, which disproves what the calumniators and conspirators say, Allāh directs the Prophet to be completely and sincerely thankful to Him for His bounty; to devote himself to Him alone in worship and ritual slaughter, taking no heed whatsoever of all forms of polytheists, especially when they pronounce any name other than that of Allāh in their offerings.

Frequently, Al-Qarḍāwī (1994: 45) and Qutb (1985:324) agree that Islam lays emphasis on the pronouncing of Allah’s name when slaughtering animals. It prohibits anything that is consecrated to any other being, which indicates the importance Islam attaches to the purification of human life from all forms of polytheism and all that leads to it.

The word *shāni’*, according to al-Baghdādī (1987:312), as used in the original is derived from *sha’n*, which means the hatred and spite because of which a person may start ill-treating another. At another place in the Glorious Qur’ān it has been said:

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witnesses; and let not enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just; that is nearer to piety; and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is well acquainted with what you do (Qur’ān,5:8).

Thus, *shāni’aka* implies every such person who blinded by his enmity of the Prophet should bring false accusations against him, slander and defame him and vent his personal spite against him by taunting and scoffing at him in every possible way.

The word *abtar* is derived from *batar* which means to cut off, but idiomatically it is used in a comprehensive meaning. According to a Hadith, “every piece of work, which is in any way important, is *abtar* if it is started without the glorification and praise of Allah”, implying that it is cut off from the root (Maududi, 2013:577 and Cowan, 1960:40). It has no stability, and it is doomed to failure. It also used for a man who fails to achieve his object. It is applicable to the

one who is deprived of all means and resources. It is at the same time used for a person who is left with no hope of any good and success in life. In fact, it is used for a person who has been cut off from his family, brotherhood, associates and helpers.

The word *abtar* is also used for the man who has no male child, or whose male child or children have died, for after him there remains no one to remember him, he is lost to posterity after death. In almost all these meanings the disbelieving Quraysh called the Prophet *abtar* (al-Qurtubī, 1994:195). At this, Allāh said:

O Prophet, not you but your enemies are *abtar*

This was not merely a reprisal but a prophecy out of the most important prophecies of the Qur'ān, which literally proved true. When it was made, the people regarded the Prophet as *abtar*, and no one could imagine how the big chiefs of the Quraysh would become *abtar*, who were famous not only in Makkah but throughout Arabia.

They were successful in life, rich in worldly wealth and children, who had their associates and helpers everywhere, who enjoyed intimate relations with all the Arabian tribes, being monopolists in trade and managers of Ḥajj. But not long afterwards the conditions altogether changed. Within some years the whole Arabia came under the Prophet's control, deputations of tribes from all over the country began to visit him to take the oaths of allegiance and his enemies were left utterly helpless and resource less ((Al-Rāzī, 1987:498).

They were so lost to posterity that even if their children survived, none of them today knows that he is a descendant of Abū Jāhl, Abū Lahb, 'Āṣ bin Wā'il, or 'Uqbah bin Abī Mu'yat, the enemies of Islam, and even if he knows it, he is not prepared to claim that his ancestors were those people. On the contrary, blessings are being invoked on the children of the Prophet throughout the world, many people take pride in bearing relationship to him, and many people also regard it as a mark of honour and prestige to have descended not only from him but from his family and even the families of his companions.

“For he who hates you (O Muḥammad), he will be cut off (from posterity and every good thing in this world and in the Hereafter)”. Allāh specified in the first verse that the Prophet was not the one who had no posterity but, on the contrary, was the one endowed with abundance. In this verse, Allāh throws back the taunt on those who hated and reviled the Prophet. Indeed, the promise of Allāh has come true. For, the influence and legacy of the Prophet's enemies was short-lived, while his impact on human history and human life has grown and deepened. Truly, faith and goodness cannot be barren as they leave deep-rooted influence on human life but falsehood, error and evil – no matter how fast they grow and spread – do ultimately come to nothing.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have dwelled on the linguistic background of *Kawthar* which connotes abundance and a host of other good glad tidings. We equally discussed the historical background and the circumstances surrounding its revelation are very germane in unfolding its meaning. We have exegetically analyzed the issues discussed in the chapter such as news about abundance to the Prophet, commandment to the establishment of prayer and offering sacrifice to Allāh who

throws back the taunt on those who hated and reviled the Prophet. Indeed, the promise of Allāh has come true. For, the influence and legacy of the Prophet's enemies was short-lived, while his impact on human history and human life has grown and deepened. Muslims have been enjoined not rejoice at their neighbour's distress or misfortune even if they do not agree with him.

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