

Coming when it did, this testimony provided consolation to the Prophet for the stern opposition by the Jews to his message and their scheming against it.

It also provided assurance to the early Muslims in Madinah who faced determined assaults from the Jews, the magnitude of which is evidenced by the campaign launched in the Qur'an to repel it. This testimony is followed by a stern and fearsome warning to those who deny the message of Islam. "Those who disbelieve and debar others from the way of God have indeed gone far astray. (167) Those who disbelieve and persist in wrongdoing will find that God will never forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, (168) except the road to hell, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time. That is indeed easy for God. (169)

The description of the unbelievers contained in this warning, though general in its import, applies primarily to the Jews and describes their attitude towards Islam and the Muslims, and indeed towards the truth generally. It applies equally to those of them who lived in the early days of Islam in Madinah and those who lived at the time of Moses himself, as well as to succeeding generations of Jews up to the present day, with the exception of a small number who opened their hearts to Divine guidance and followed it.

Those Jews, as well as any group of people to whom the description of disbelieving and debarring others from the way of God applies, have indeed gone far astray. They have turned away from God's guidance and strayed from the proper way of life which ensures man's happiness. They have erred in their concepts and beliefs, behaviour and social system, and in every aspect of this life generally. This means that their concept regarding the life to come is also erroneous. Immense in error as they are, there is little hope that they can recognise Divine guidance and follow it. For they "have indeed gone far astray... (167)".

They are again described as unbelievers, but this time they are also described as wrongdoers "Those who disbelieve and persist in wrongdoing... (168)

To disbelieve is indeed to act wrongfully and to do injustice to the truth, to self and to mankind. Sometimes the Qur'an describes disbelief as injustice or wrongdoing, as in God's statement: "To associate partners with God is to commit grave injustice." (31: 31) He also says: "They who do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are indeed wrongdoers." (5: 45) In the preceding verse, He describes them as unbelievers. (This will be discussed in detail in Volume IV, God willing.) As for those Jews, they did not commit only the injustice of associating partners with God but they also persisted in wrongdoing by debarring people from the way of God. In other words, they were up to their ears in disbelief and wrongdoing. Hence, their just punishment is determined by God: "Those who disbelieve and persist in wrongdoing will find that God will never forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, (168) except the road to hell, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time. That is indeed easy for God. (169) It is unfair that God should forgive such people after they have gone far astray and deprived themselves of every

having first sent a message. As it happened, there was no universal message prior to Islam. Such a universal message was, therefore, inevitable, to ensure God's justice and mercy to mankind. This proves God's description of His Messenger: "We have only sent you as mercy to mankind." (21: 107) He is, indeed, a manifestation of God's mercy in this life and in the life to come, as appears clearly from this Qur'anic statement.

Grace of the Highest Type

Before we conclude our comments on this verse, we need to reflect a little with our heads bowed in acknowledgement of God's greatness, His knowledge of man, His fairness to him, as well as the care, mercy and grace He extends to him, despite his excessive ingratitude.

Let us first reflect for a moment on God's thorough and perfect knowledge of man, his capabilities and potentials, as well as his inherent susceptibility to follow guidance or to go astray. It is on the basis of His knowledge of man that God has not left him to what his mind, the great gift He has given him, may dictate, even though it makes numerous and clear indicators which point out the way to faith. God knows that this great tool He has placed at man's disposal may be influenced by man's desires and that the indicators He has placed all over the horizon and within man himself may be screened from man, deliberately or through ignorance. Therefore, He does not hold man's intellect responsible for following right guidance or for turning away from it until He has made it clear to him through His messengers. Moreover, even after such a clear message has been given, the task of devising a way of life is not assigned to man. What he is assigned to is the implementation of the way of life laid down by God. Beyond that, God has given man a vast dominion to do with it whatever he likes, changing it as he pleases, and analysing it the way he wishes.

We should also reflect a little on the Divine justice which provides people with an argument against God, had He not sent them messengers to raise before them happy prospects and also to warn them against the pitfalls in their way. These messengers are sent in addition to all the indicators in the universe and within man, testifying to God's oneness, His great creation, profound knowledge and infinite ability. Added to this is also the strong inclination of human nature to believe in God and to submit to Him. We should also remember in this respect the harmony between the indicators in the universe and the natural inclination and ability of man's mind to collate information and arrive at conclusions. God, however, is fully aware of the weaknesses that may affect all these factors, clouding their work, blurring people's vision and causing them to arrive at the wrong findings. Therefore, the pointers of the universe, human nature and intellect are not judged by God as sufficient on their own, unless He sends messengers to make sure that these instruments are not

Part 6 Surah 4 Al-Nisa' Verses 165 - 170

[These] were messengers sent to bring good news and to give warning, so that people may have no argument against God once these messengers (had come). God is Almighty, Wise. (165) However it be, God [Himself] bears witness to the truth of what He has bestowed from on high to you: with His knowledge He bestowed it from on high; and the angels also bear witness to that; although God is sufficient as a witness. (166) Those who disbelieve and debar others from the way of God have indeed gone far astray. (167) Those who disbelieve and persist in wrongdoing will find that God will never forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, (168) except the road to hell, wherein they will abide beyond the count of time. That is indeed easy for God. (169) Mankind, the messenger has now come to you with the truth from your Lord. Believe, then, for it is better for you. But if you disbelieve, know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise. (170)

165-169 The Supreme Witness

What we have said so far is sufficient to explain the clear feelings generated by the Qur'anic statement: "[These] were messengers sent to bring good news and to give warning, so that people may have no argument against God once these messengers (had come). God is Almighty, Wise." (165)

We will now proceed with our commentary on the rest of this passage.

People however may deny that message for different reasons. People who have received earlier revelations from God through earlier prophets may deny the final message given to Muhammad (peace be upon him), although it follows the same pattern of sending messengers to bring happy news to God's servants and to warn them against disbelief. Those who received earlier revelations believe in the messengers who were sent before Muhammad: the Jews acknowledged all messengers who came before Jesus (peace be upon him) and the Christians acknowledged all these as well as Jesus, to whom they attribute a Divine nature, as will be explained later. Addressing the Prophet, God consoles him for facing such rejection:

"However it be, God [Himself] bears witness to the truth of what He has bestowed from on high to you: with His knowledge He bestowed it from on high; and the angels also bear witness to that; although God is sufficient as a witness." (166)

This testimony by God and the angels, some of whom were entrusted with carrying the message to Muhammad (peace be upon him), reduces to nothing all that may be said by those claiming to follow earlier revelations. What significance have they when God Himself gives His testimony and the angels do likewise? Surely God's testimony is enough on its own.

chance of forgiveness. It is also unfair that He should guide them to any road other than that leading to hell, because they have turned away from every road of guidance and sealed off every route leading anywhere other than the one leading to hell. They have gone far along that road, deserving to stay in hell for ever, without any hope of being saved again. "That is indeed easy for God (169)", for He has the upper hand over every one of His servants. Moreover, He has no special relationship with anyone of His creation to make it difficult for Him to exact such a just punishment. Nor can their punishment be made less easy by any power or force possessed by His servants. The Jews and the Christians used to say that they were God's own children and His beloved ones. They also said: "The fire will not touch us except for a small number of days." (2: 80) They also claimed to be God's chosen people. The Qur'an denies all this and puts them back in their place among God's other servants. They have the same prospects as anyone else: they receive reward if they do well, and they are punished if they do badly, do not repent or pray for forgiveness. All this is easy for God.

170 This is followed by a universal call to all mankind, to tell them that God's Messenger has come to them with the truth from their Lord. He who believes in him does well. Those who deny him should know that God has no need for any of them and He can overpower them all. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. He is aware of everything, and He runs all affairs according to His knowledge and wisdom:

Mankind, the Messenger has now come to you with the truth from your Lord. Believe, then, for it is better for you. But if you disbelieve, know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. God is indeed All-Knowing, Wise. (170).

This call to all mankind to believe in the last message was preceded by a recital of all the false claims made by people to whom revelations were given at earlier times. This together with the unmasking of the true nature of the Jews and their evil deeds throughout their history. Their inherent obstinacy, even in their attitude towards Moses, their Prophet, leader and saviour, is also exposed. The call is also preceded by an explanation of the nature of this last message and its purpose, both of which require that God sends messengers and sends Muhammad to all mankind. Having sent a number of messengers with messages to their own nations, it is only logical that this process should culminate with a final, universal message to all mankind "so that people may have no argument against God, once the messengers had come... (165)". Had this final message not been addressed to all mankind, later generations would have had an argument against God. But the final and universal message of Muhammad (peace be upon him) has stopped any such argument. To deny that a message should come after the Jewish prophets, including or excluding Jesus (peace be upon him), is contrary to God's justice which ensures that no punishment can be exacted without

Using his intellect and guided by the Divine message, man can make great achievements to which he cannot aspire otherwise. This is evidenced by the fact that throughout human history, no great mind has managed to devise the ideological concept, the personal discipline, the code of living or the social system which ordinary intellects were able to devise when guided by the Divine message.

Plato and Aristotle were endowed with great minds. It is even said that Aristotle had the greatest mind in human history. When we consider his concept of the Divine being as he devised it independently from God's guidance, we realise how greatly inferior it is to the concept of an ordinary Muslim who follows the Divine message.

In ancient Egypt, Akhenaton advocated monotheism. He might have been influenced by the messages of the Prophets Abraham and Joseph, but even then, there are gaps and legends in his faith making the monotheistic concept of an ordinary Muslim infinitely superior to Akhenaton's monotheistic religion.

In moral standards, we find in the early periods of Islam ordinary people, educated and disciplined by God's Messenger, achieving heights to which even the greatest of people cannot aspire, when they are not guided by a Divine message.

As for principles, systems and legislation, Islam achieves a degree of balance and harmony which is absolutely unique. The sort of harmony and ease of life which are characteristic of Islamic society are never to be found in any other society, prior to Islam or after it.

It is not the standard of material civilisation which we should judge. This is something that increases with scientific advancement. The quality of life at any particular time is judged by the balance and harmony achieved between all its aspects and systems. That balance is the source of happiness which brings out all human potentials and gives them a chance to work in harmony, without any excesses. As we have already said, humanity has never known a perfect system such as that of Islam. Imbalance is characteristic of every non-Islamic system, although it may have its bright aspects. It is always the trend that certain aspects of human life may be promoted at the expense of others. With such an imbalance, humanity continues to suffer. Its only saviour is the perfect, balanced and harmonious system of Islam.

influenced by any foreign element as also to control their work according to the right standard shown in the Divine message. It is only when this is accomplished that the universe, human nature, and intellect will give the right and proper judgement. At this point in time, it becomes obligatory for people to submit to God and to obey Him. Their argument for not doing so is rendered futile and they, then, deserve punishment.

We must also reflect a little on the great care God takes of man and the grace He bestows on him, knowing, as He does, what weaknesses and shortcomings he may have. Nevertheless, He puts him in charge of the earth, which is, to man, a great kingdom, although it is no more than a little particle within God's great dominion!

God's care, grace and mercy take man even further. Despite all the indicators and the work of God's messengers, man continues to reject the faith, stubbornly following erring ways. Yet God does not withhold from him His grace and favour. Nor does He deprive him of the guidance He has made available through His messengers. Indeed, He does not inflict punishment on him either in this world or in the hereafter until His messengers have conveyed His messages and man continues in rejecting them until his death.

Man very often boasts to himself that he can do without his Lord, His care, mercy, guidance, religion and messengers. He claims that he has all he needs for proper guidance, making use of his intellect, when God, his Creator, knows that this is not sufficient for him, unless it is set on the proper course pointed out by Him. This brings to mind the example of a little child just beginning to walk. He feels a little strength in his legs and lets go of his mother's supporting hand. He immediately stumbles and falls. The child in this example, however, is wiser and more responsive to nature. He is naturally inclined to make use of his latent skill, develop his ability, train his muscles and become totally independent. By contrast, the man who lets go of God's supporting hand has no natural inclination to steer away from Divine guidance. The best that he can do for himself is to follow Divine guidance, which ensures that all his powers are used properly and directed wisely. If he turns away from Divine guidance and trusts to his own devices, his powers will be certain to malfunction.

Erroneous, indeed, is every claim which suggests that great minds are not in need of God's message to make great achievements. The fact is that the Divine message provides the human mind with the proper method of reflection and deduction to arrive at proper conclusions. If it errs, its error is similar to that of a clock set right, but later influenced by atmospheric and other factors affecting its movement. It is not like the error of a clock that was never properly set, but left to work at random, giving the right time only by pure coincidence. The difference between the two is great indeed.