

110417 - Meaning of the verse “Has there not been over man a period of time, when he was not a thing worth mentioning?”

the question

This has reference to chapter 76 Al-Insan or Ad Dahr verse 1. Has there not been over a man a period of time.... to be mentioned. What does the period of time imply? Is Adam peace be upon him Isaa peace be upon him and prophet (sws) are included in insan.

Detailed answer

Soorat al-Insaan begins with a gentle rhetorical question which alerts man to the fact that he was nothing before he was created, and Who is the one Who created him and made him something worth mentioning after he had been nothing. It comes in the form of a question so as to attract the listener’s attention and make him listen out for the words that come after it. So Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Has there not been over man a period of time, when he was not a thing worth mentioning?”

[al-Insaan 76:1]

The words insan (man) in this verse includes all of mankind, because all of mankind are created; they came into existence after they did not exist and were not a thing worth mentioning, as Allaah said to the Prophet Zakariya (peace be upon him) (interpretation of the meaning):

“He said: ‘So (it will be). Your Lord says: It is easy for Me. Certainly I have created you before, when you had been nothing!’”

[Maryam 19:9].

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmaan al-Sa’di (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

In this soorah Allaah mentions the first state of man, and his beginning, middle and end. He says that for a long time – which is before man was created – he was nothing, and was not even worth mentioning. End quote.

Tayseer al-Kareem al-Rahmaan fi'l-Tafseer Kalaam al-Mannaan (p. 900).

Al-'Allamah al-Taahir Ibn 'Ashoor (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

What this means is: Does every man who exists realize that he was non-existent for a long time, and he was not a thing worth mentioning, i.e., he had no name and he was not spoken of. The word insaan (man) is used to refer to mankind in general, as in the verse “Verily, man is in loss, Except those who believe ...” [al-'Asr 104:2-3].

i.e., has there not been over every man a period of time when he was not a thing? Dahr (translated here as “a time”) refers to a long time. End quote.

Al-Tahreer wa'l-Tanweer (29/345-346).

Perhaps this view, which was narrated from Ibn 'Abbaas and Ibn Jurayj, is more sound than the view that it is Adam in particular who is referred to by the word insaan (man). The context is general in meaning, and points to the general meaning of the verse that comes after it, in which Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “Verily, We have created man from Nutfah (drops) of mixed semen (sexual discharge of man and woman), in order to try him, so We made him hearer and seer” [al-Insaan 75:2]. It is known that it is the sons of Adam who are created from “Nutfah (drops) of mixed semen”, so this indicates that what is meant by the word insaan in the first verse is all of mankind.

This statement that man had no prior existence has to do with the creation of man and reality. In this sense the statement includes all of mankind, even the Messengers and Prophets. All of them were non-existent, then Allaah created them.

With regard to the knowledge of Allaah, all of mankind are known in Allaah's eternal knowledge, and are recorded in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz, but the Messengers and Prophets have a special mention in the highest degrees, so they are the best of mankind, and their being

mentioned in the knowledge of Allaah is appropriate to the high status of Prophethood and Messengership which Allaah has bestowed upon them.

And Allaah knows best.