135711 - How come the righteous are tested in this world, when Allah says in the Qur’an “We will surely cause him to live a good life” [an-Nahl 16:97]?

the question

There are some things that appear to me to be contradictory, and I need you to enlighten me with your knowledge, may Allah reward you with good. We find that the righteous are tested in this world, and the stronger their faith, the greater the trial. But Allah says in the Qur’an (interpretation of the meaning): “We will surely cause him to live a good life” [an-Nahl 16:97].

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It must be understood that what Allah says cannot contradict reality at all, because what Allah, may He be exalted, says is the ultimate level of truth. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in justice”

[al-An‘aam 6:115]

“and who is more truthful than Allah in statement?”

[an-Nisaa’ 4:122]

“And who is more truthful than Allah in statement?”

[an-Nisaa’ 4:87].

Secondly:

Undoubtedly the greater the trial is, the more the reward increases, and when Allah loves a people, He tests them; in the testing of a person there is great wisdom and many benefits, in this world and in the hereafter.

For more information, please see the answers to questions no. 35914 and 21631.

With regard to what is meant by the "good life" mentioned in the verse, "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do" [an-Nahl 16:97], there are various scholarly views concerning it, none of which suggests that Allah will grant a life of ease and luxury to the believer who does righteous deeds, and protect him from grief, poverty and harm. Reality testifies otherwise; in fact, the righteous are among the people who are most sorely tested with such trials. All that is meant by the "good life" in this verse is the life of the heart (spiritual life), and the sense of joy and reassurance that the believer has; if he is blessed with some worldly pleasures and joys, that will be from a halal source and he will be content with it. This meaning is what the commentators referred to in their discussions on this phrase.

1.

Imam at-Tabari (may Allah have mercy on him) quoted the views of the scholars concerning what is meant by the good life. Those views are as follows:

1. He will grant them halaal provision throughout their lives in this world.
2. He will bless them with contentment.
3. The good life is a life of faith in Allah and striving to obey Him.
4. The good life is happiness.
5. It refers to life in Paradise.

Out of these views – which do not contradict one another – he (may Allah have mercy on him) chose the second one, then he said:

The most likely of these views to be correct is the view of those who said that this is to be interpreted as meaning: We will grant him a good life by means of contentment. What that means is that whomever Allah makes content with what He has allocated to him of provision (rizq), he will not exhaust himself in pursuit of worldly gains, or toil too much for that purpose, and he will not be troubled by striving hard to pursue what he has missed out on of worldly pleasures and to attain that which he may never be able to attain …

With regard to the view that was narrated from Ibn ‘Abbaas, that what is referred to is halaal provision, it is possible that what he meant was what we have mentioned concerning that, and that Allah, may He be exalted, will make him content in this world with what He has granted him of halal provision, even if it is little, so he will not aspire to acquire a lot of provision if it is from haraam sources. It does not mean that He will grant him a great deal of provision from halaal sources. That is because in the case of most of those who strive hard for the sake of Allah, may He be exalted, by doing righteous deeds, we do not see them being granted a great deal of provision in this world from halaal sources; rather we find that they usually have a harder life rather than a life of ease and abundance.

Tafseer at-Tabari (17/291-292).

2.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The most enjoyable and pleasurable life of all is that of those who love Allah and find comfort in remembrance of Him. Their life is the good life in the true sense, and there is no life that is better, more enjoyable and more blessed than that. It is the good life that is mentioned in the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life” [an-Nahl 16:97]. That does not mean the kind of life that both believers and disbelievers, righteous and evildoers, may share in terms of good food, good drink, good clothing and physical pleasure. Rather the enemies of Allah may have much more of that than His close friends, but He – may He be glorified – has guaranteed to those who do righteous deeds that He will give them a good life, and His promise is true, for He does not

break His promise. What life could be better than the life of one who has all his worries and concerns reduced to a single worry and concern, which is to please Allah, so his mind and thoughts are not scattered; rather he is totally focused on Allah and his aims and thoughts, rather than being scattered in all directions, are completely focused on Allah. Hence remembrance of Allah (dhikr), loving Him, longing to meet Him and finding comfort in being close to Him, become the dearest of matters to him and dominate his thoughts. All his concerns, aims and thoughts – even passing thoughts – are focused on that goal. …

Al-Jawaab al-Kaafi (p. 129, 130).

He (may Allah have mercy on him) also said:

The “good life” has been interpreted as referring to contentment and being happy with one’s lot and with good (halaal) provision, and so on. The correct view is that it is the life of the heart (spiritual life) and finding joy and delight in faith, knowing Allah, loving Him, turning to Him and putting one’s trust in Him. No life is better than the life of the one who has attained this, and no delight is greater than the delights of such a life, except the delights of Paradise. One of those who attained such a life said: Sometimes I feel such joy in my heart that I say that if the people of Paradise experience like this, then their life is indeed a good life. Someone else said: Sometimes I feel such joy in my heart that it is as if it is dancing with joy.

Madaarij as-Saalikeen (3/259).

There are many similar statements, all of which indicate that the good life is the spiritual life enjoyed by the heart of the believer who is content with the decree of Allah, may He be exalted, and is happy with whatever He decrees for him and with his faith in his Lord, may He be exalted. The phrase the good life definitely does not refer to physical pleasure and the absence of sickness, poverty and hardship.

We should point out that the view that the good life is only in Paradise is far-fetched and is not what the verse means, because Allah, may He be exalted, mentions after it the delights of Paradise for those who believe and do righteous deeds.

Shaykh Muhammad al-Ameen ash-Shinqeeti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

In the verse there is an indication that what is meant by the good life here is a good life in this world. That is indicated by the fact that if we say that what is meant by the good life in the phrase “We will surely cause him to live a good life” is his life in Paradise, then what comes after it, “and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do” becomes a repetition of that, because that good life (in the hereafter) is the reward of their good deeds. In contrast, if we say that the good life is in this world, then the meaning is: We will surely grant him a good life in this world, and We will surely reward him in the hereafter according to the best of what he used to do. This is clear, and this is the meaning that is indicated by the Qur’an and is supported by proven hadiths from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). End quote.

Adwaa’ al-Bayaan (2/441).

Based on that, the good life for the believer in this world does not mean that he will not go through some tests and trials, for several reasons:

1.

The Muslim knows that raising of status, absolution of bad deeds and attaining goals cannot happen except by means of trials and tests. Hence the early generations would rejoice at times of trials, because of what they hoped for of reward and recompense, as is mentioned in the hadith narrated from Abu Sa‘eed al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: I said: O Messenger of Allah, which people are most severely tested? He said: “The Prophets.” I said: O Messenger of Allah, then who? He said: “Then the righteous, some of whom were tested with poverty until they could not find anything except a cloak to put around themselves. One of them will rejoice at calamity as one of you would rejoice at ease.”

Narrated by Ibn Maajah (4024); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Ibn Maajah.

This joy (at being put through trials and calamity) is different from wishing for calamity, because

wishing for trials andcalamity is not permissible, as it is narrated in the hadith from ‘Abdullah ibn Abi Awfa (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “O people, do not wish to meet the enemy, and ask Allah for well-being.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6810) and Muslim (1742).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If you contemplate Allah’s wisdom and the reason why He tests His slaves and chosen ones, and how He enables them to attain the most sublime goals that they could not have attained except by means of trials and tests, then you would realize that these trials and tests are an absolute honour in their case, for what they go through may look like a trial and test, but in reality it is a mercy and a blessing. How many great blessings and favours Allah bestows by means of trials and tests. So think about our father Adam (peace be upon him), and how his trial and test ended with Allah choosing him, bringing him close to Him, accepting his repentance, guiding him and raising him in status. Think about our second father, Nooh (peace be upon him), and how his trial and his patience with his people throughout all those centuries ended with Allah granting him satisfaction and drowning the people of the earth in response to his prayer, after which He caused the earth to be populated with his progeny; made him the fifth of the five Messengers of strong will, who are the best of the Messengers; He commanded His Messenger and Prophet, Muhammad, to emulate his patience; and He praised him for his gratitude and said (interpretation of the meaning): “Indeed, he was a grateful servant” [al-Israa’ 17:3], describing him as having attained the highest level of patience and gratitude. Think about our third father, Ibraaheem (peace be upon him), the leader of the monotheists, the shaykh of the Prophets, the pillar of the world, the Khaleel (Close Friend) of the Lord of the Worlds among the sons of Adam. Think about how his trial and patience ended, and how he was ready to offer himself for the sake of Allah. Think about where his willingness to offer himself for the sake of Allah took him; because he strove to support the religion of Allah, Allah took him as His close friend… Allah increased his progeny, blessed them and made them numerous to the extent that they filled the world, and He granted Prophethood and Scriptures to his progeny only, from among whom he brought forth Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and commanded him to follow the path of his father Ibraaheem…

When you come to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), think about his life with his people, his patience for the sake of Allah, his enduring what no other prophet had endured before him, and how he went through different circumstances, such as safety and fear, wealth and poverty, security and feeling settled in his homeland, then departing from his homeland, leaving it for the sake of Allah, the killing of his loved ones and close friends in front of him, and how the disbelievers caused him a great deal of harm, in word and in deed, by use of magic, by lying and making false accusations against him. Yet despite all that, he was patient in adhering to Allah's command, and calling people to Him. No prophet was ever harmed as he was and no prophet had to endure what he endured, but no prophet was ever blessed as he was blessed, for Allah raised high his renown and caused his name to be mentioned alongside His own (in the testimony of faith); He made him the leader of all mankind; He made him the closest of people to Him, the greatest in status before Him, and the one whose intercession will be most heard. All those tests and trials were, in reality, a blessing by means of which Allah increased him in honour and virtue, and caused him to attain the highest status. This is the situation of his heirs [the scholars and righteous] after him, the best and then the next best; each of them has a share of trials, by means of which Allah causes him to attain perfection commensurate with the extent to which he follows the Prophet.

Miftaah Daar as-Sa'aadeh (1/299-301).

2.

The paradise of the Muslim is in his heart, even if he is beset by all kinds of trials. Ibn al-Qayyim said, describing the attitude of his shaykh, Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him), when he was going through all kinds of tests and trials:

He – meaning Shaykh al-Islam – said to me on one occasion: "What can my enemies do to me? My paradise and my garden are in my heart; wherever I go, it is with me and never leaves me. If they detain me, I am alone (with my Lord). If they kill me, it is martyrdom. If they expel me from my homeland, it is a journey (and an opportunity to see other lands)." During the time when he was detained in the citadel, he used to say: "If they were to fill this citadel with gold, it would not be

equal in reward to showing gratitude for this blessing." And he said: "I have never rewarded them for the good that they caused me to attain." And so on.

He used to say, when he prostrated in his prayers whilst he was in prison: "O Allah, help me to remember You, give thanks to You and worship You properly. Ma sha Allah." On one occasion he said to me: "The one who is really detained is the one whose heart is kept away from his Lord, may He be exalted, and the one who is really imprisoned is the one who is imprisoned by his whims and desires." When he was taken into the citadel and was within its walls, he looked at it and said: "And a wall will be placed between them with a door, its interior containing mercy, but on the outside of it is torment" [al-Hadeed 57:13]. Allah knows that I have never seen anyone who enjoyed life more than him, despite what he suffered of hardship and a lack of comfort and ease – rather he endured the opposite – and despite what he endured of imprisonment, threats and hardship. Despite all that, he had the best life and was the most content, the most steadfast and the happiest. You could see the radiance of joy on his face. When our fear grew intense and we felt pessimistic, and we despaired of ever finding any way out, we would go to him, and whenever we saw him and listened to his words, it would dispel all those feelings, and we would feel reassurance, strength, certainty and peace of mind. Glory be to the One Who caused His slaves to experience His Paradise before meeting Him, and opened its gates to them during their life in this world, so that they felt its comfort, breeze and fragrance, which motivated them to focus all that energy on seeking it.

Al-Waabil at-Tayyin (p. 115).

This paradise that Shaykh al-Islam found, and that the people of faith and piety find, with its reassurance and peace of mind, and a life lived between gratitude and patience, is indeed the happiness that is sought by people of mature thinking and righteous people, for which the strivers strive.

This indeed is the true meaning of the good life that Allah has promised them in this world.

May Allah grant it to us and to you, and make us among its people.

For more information on the benefits of tests and trials for the believer, please see the answer to question no. 12099.

And Allah knows best.