22351 - Ruling on interpreting the Qur’aan according to modern theories

the question

Is it permissible to interpret the Qur’aan according to modern scientific theories?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked this question, and he replied as follows:

There are some risks involved in interpreting the Qur’aan according to modern theories. That is because, if we interpret the Qur’aan according to those theories, then other theories are produced which contradict them, this implies that the Qur’aan will be incorrect in the view of the enemies of Islam. The Muslims would say that the error is in the understanding of the one who interpreted the Qur’aan in that manner, but the enemies of Islam are always watching for an opportunity to attack Islam. Hence we must exercise the utmost caution against rushing into interpreting the Qur’aan according to these scientific matters. We must leave these alone and let matters take their course. If it is proven that some of these theories are correct, we do not need to say that the Qur’aan has already proven it, the Qur’aan was revealed for the purpose of worship and moral, and for people to ponder its meanings. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“(This is) a Book (the Qur’aan) which We have sent down to you, full of blessings, that they may ponder over its Verses, and that men of understanding may remember”

[Saad 38:29]

It was not revealed concerning these matters which are subject to experimentation and which people study as part of their scientific quest. It may also be very dangerous to apply the aayahs of the Qur’aan to these theories. For example, Allaah said (interpretation of the meaning):

“O assembly of jinn and men! If you have power to pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the earth, then pass beyond (them)! But you will never be able to pass them, except with authority (from Allaah)!”

[al-Rahmaan 55:33]

When man reached the moon, some people started to interpret this aayah and apply it to this event of reaching the moon, and they said that what was meant by authority was science and that by their science they had passed beyond the zones of the earth and escaped the gravitational pull (of the earth). This is wrong; it is not permissible to interpret the Qur’aan in this way. What this implies is that you are testifying that thius is what Allaah meant. This is a serious testimony and you will be questioned concerning that.

Whoever ponders the meaning of this aayah will find that this interpretation is incorrect, because this aayah comes after the aayahs (interpretation of the meaning):

“Whatsoever is on it (the earth) will perish.

And the Face of your Lord full of Majesty and Honour will remain forever.

Then which of the Blessings of your Lord will you both (jinn and men) deny?”

[al-Rahmaan 55:26, 28]

So we ask: did these people manage to pass beyond the zones of the heavens?

The answer is no, for Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“If you have power to pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the earth, then pass beyond (them)!”

[al-Rahmaan 55:33]

Secondly: has there been sent against them flames of fire and copper?

The answer is no. So the aayah cannot be interpreted in this manner. We say that they reached what they reached through science and experimentation. But for us to distort the meaning of the Qur’aan and to try to make it fit this event, this is not correct and is not permitted.