256318 - How can man have free will, when Allah has already created some people for Paradise and some people for Hell?

the question

I would like to verify the soundness of something that I have read. Is it true that when Allah created man, He wiped Adam’s back and said: These are the people of Hell, and I do not care, and these are the people of Paradise, and I do not care? How can that be when our Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, is oft-forgiving, most merciful, and loves His slaves? What is the meaning of the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “Indeed, Allah leaves astray whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]” [ar-Ra‘d 13:27], when man has free will? Please do not think ill of me.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The hadith referred to is that which was narrated by Ahmad (311), Abu Dawood (4703) and at-Tirmidhi (3075): ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab was asked about this verse: “And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants …” [al-A’raaf 7:172]. ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) being asked about it and the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah created Adam, then He passed His right hand over his loins and brought forth from him some offspring and said: ‘I have created these for Paradise and they will do the deeds of the people of Paradise.’ Then He passed (His hand) over his loins and brought forth from him some (other) offspring and said: ‘I have created these for Hell and they will do the deeds of the people of Hell.’”

A man said: O Messenger of Allah, why then should we strive?

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “When Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, creates a person for Paradise, He causes him to do the deeds of the people of Paradise until he dies doing one of the deeds of the people of Paradise, and He causes him to enter Paradise thereby. And when He creates a person for Hell, He causes him to do the deeds of the people of Hell until he dies doing one of the deeds of the people of Hell, and He causes him to enter Hell thereby.”

Imam at-Tirmidhi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: This is a hasan hadith. Muslim ibn Yasaar did not hear [directly] from ‘Umar. Some of them stated that in this isnaad, between Muslim ibn Yasaar and ‘Umar there is a man who is unknown (majhool).

See: as-Sunan, ‘Isaam Haadi edition.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (may Allah have mercy on him) said: … This is a hadith with an interrupted isnaad (munqati‘), because this Muslim ibn Yasaar did not meet ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab, and between them [in the chain of narration] is Na‘eem ibn Rabee‘ah…

In addition to that, both Na‘eem ibn Rabee‘ah and Muslim ibn Yasaar are unknown [majhool – i.e., their status as narrators is unknown]; they are not known to have had knowledge or to have narrated hadith.

This man called Muslim is not Muslim ibn Yasaar al-Basri, the devoted worshipper; rather he is an unknown Madani man.

End quote from al-Istidhkaar (26/90).

See: Mukhtasar Talkhees adh-Dhahabi by Ibn Mulaqqin (1/59-62), footnote by the commentator.

But Imam ad-Daaraqutni regarded as more sound a report other than that of Maalik, by adding Na‘eem ibn Rabee‘ah and making the isnaad uninterrupted, by mentioning the unknown man, namely this Na‘eem.

See: al-‘Ilal (2/222, no. 235).

The text of the hadith is proven through other chains of narration. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (may Allah have mercy on him) said in at-Tamheed (6/6): But the meaning of this hadith was narrated soundly from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with many proven chains of narration, which would take too long to list here, from ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab and others, too many to mention. End quote.

Shu’ayb al-Arna’oot and others also classed it as saheeh on the basis of corroborating evidence.

But Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) pointed out that the saheeh versions of the hadith do not quote the verse from al-A‘raaf.

It says in as-Silsilah ad-Da‘eefah (3071): With regard to the taking of the progeny from the loins of Adam, there are other, saheeh hadiths that are shorter than this one. Some of them are narrated in as-Saheehah (48-50), but there is no mention in them about wiping over the back except a hadith of Abu Hurayrah which is narrated in Zilaal al-Jannah (204-205). In all these reports, the verse is not quoted. End quote.

Secondly:

This hadith does not contradict the fact that Allah is merciful and forgiving, or that He, may He be glorified, is just. There is nothing in it to indicate that man is compelled to do anything. Rather this is the prior will and decree of Allah (predestination). Allah, may He be exalted, knew and decreed all that would happen, and nothing happens beyond the framework of what He has decreed.

But no person knows what has been decreed and, moreover, man has free will and the ability to act upon it. If he wishes he may believe and if he wishes he may disbelieve; if he wishes he may obey Allah and if he wishes he may disobey Him. No person feels that anything is forcing him to do anything. This is what is meant by free will. So man has no right to say that he was predestined to be guided or misguided, and he has no excuse for relying on fate (what he is predestined to do) when he does not know anything about it; rather Allah is the Creator and undoubtedly knows that.

So how can anyone think that Allah, may He be exalted, created His slave and does not know what course of action he will take or where he will ultimately end up?

Hence when the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) asked: Should we not rely on what is decreed for us and give up striving? The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) answered by saying:

“No, keep striving, for everyone will be helped to do that for which he was created. So whoever is among the blessed [destined for Paradise] will be enabled to do the deeds of the people of Paradise, and whoever is among the doomed [destined for Hell] will be enabled to do the deeds of the people of Hell.” Then he recited the words (interpretation of the meaning):

“As for he who gives and fears Allah

And believes in the best [reward]…”

[al-Layl 92:5-6].

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (4949) and Muslim (2647).

All that man has to do in this life is to try his best and strive hard, without worrying or thinking: is this decreed for me or not? For he will never be able to answer this question.

But when he knows that everything happens by the divine will and decree (predestination), he will feel reassured if calamity strikes and will not despair or say: if only I had done such and such, then such and such would have happened. This is the meaning of the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being - indeed that, for Allah, is easy -

In order that you not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you. And Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful”

[al-Hadeed 57:22-23].

Thirdly:

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, sends astray whomever He wills, and He guides whomever He wills, as He, may He be glorified, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“and Allah sends astray [thereby] whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise”

[Ibraaheem 14:4]

“And if Allah had willed, He could have made you [of] one religion, but He causes to stray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And you will surely be questioned about what you used to do”

[an-Nahl 16:93]

“Whoever Allah guides - he is the [rightly] guided; and whoever He sends astray - it is those who are the losers”

[al-A‘raaf 7:178].

Allah’s guidance is of two types: general and specific.

As for His general guidance, that is applicable to all nations, even the disbelieving nations. This is guidance in the sense of making the truth clear and showing it to them, as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance, so the thunderbolt of humiliating punishment seized them for what they used to earn”

[Fussilat 41:17]

that is, We showed them the path of truth. And Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful”

[al-Insaan 76:3].

As for His specific guidance, it applies to His believing slaves. It is guidance in the sense of enabling and helping a person to follow the truth, and showing him the right way to follow it. For example, Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Those are the ones whom Allah has guided, so from their guidance take an example. Say, "I ask of you for this message no payment. It is not but a reminder for the worlds”

[al-An‘aam 6:90]

“And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command. You did not know what is the Book or [what is] faith, but We have made it a light by which We guide whom We will of Our servants. And indeed, [O Muhammad], you guide to a straight path”

[ash-Shoora 42:52]

“And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good”

[al-‘Ankaboot 29:69]

“but Allah has endeared to you the faith and has made it pleasing in your hearts and has made hateful to you disbelief, defiance and disobedience. Those are the [rightly] guided.

[It is] as bounty from Allah and favor. And Allah is Knowing and Wise”

[al-Hujuraat 49:7-8].

As for sending astray, what is meant is leaving a person to his own devices and not supporting him with any means of help.

At-Tahhaawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his well-known book al-‘Aqeedah: He guides

whomever He wills, protecting them and keeping them sound by His grace.

And He sends astray whomever He wills, leaving him to his own devices and testing him, by His justice.

All of them are subject to His will and are dealt with on the basis of either His grace or His justice.

This has been discussed previously in the answers to questions no. 256427 and 220690.

For a discussion on the issue of whether man has no choice or has free will, please see the answers to questions no. 34898 and 20806.

Our advice is that you should strive to attain the deeds of the people who are blessed (destined for Paradise), and you should not let your mind be preoccupied with the issue of the divine will and decree (predestination), because this is a divine secret that Allah has kept from His creation. So strive to do what you are enjoined to do, which is to believe and do righteous deeds, and leave what you are not enjoined to do, which is to find out about the subtleties of the divine will and decree.

I ask Allah to guide and help you, and to make you steadfast in faith until you meet Him.

And Allah knows best.