98714 - Testing in the Hereafter of those who lived in the interval between two Prophets

the question

My question is about the hadith of the prophet (PBUH):

Imam Ahmed Ben Hanbal narrated in his “Musnad” and Al-bayhaqi in his book “Al- I’tiqaad”, and classed as Saheeh by Al-Aswad Ben Saree’ that the prophet (PBUH) said:
“Four types of people will be tested on the day of judgement: a deaf man who cannot hear anything, a mad man, an old aged man and a man who died during fatrah (a period of time when no messenger was sent to people). The deaf man will say: “Oh Allah, Islam came while I cannot hear anything!”. The mad man will say: “Oh Allah, Islam came while the boys throw animals’ excrement on me!”. The old aged man will say: “Oh Allah, Islam came while I can understand nothing”. And the man who died during a fatrah will say: “Oh Allah, I witnessed no messenger from You”. Then Allah takes a promise from them to obey Him. Then He will command them to enter hell, and who enters it will find it peace and cool, and who disobeys will be dragged to hell”
My question is:
Will there be a test on the day of judgement? What I know is it is a day for bringing humans to account only, without testing.
Another note:
This test to enter hell is very difficult, and it is not logical. As our minds know that fire is dangerous and it is natural that a human will fear getting into it. This is not like the tests we are exposed to in life, which we are obliged to by our straight forward Islamic teachings.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) differed concerning the people of the fatrah – who are those lived in the time when no Messenger came to them and were in a place where the call did not reach them – and those who come under the same rulings as them, such as the children of the mushrikeen. There are several points of view, the most correct of which is that they will be tested on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever obeys the command of Allah will be saved and whoever disobeys Him will be doomed. There are many ahadith from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) which support this view, such as that which was mentioned by the brother in his question, and which was quoted in full by Imam Ibn Katheer in his commentary on the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “And We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (to give warning)” [al-Isra’ 17:15]. The one who wants to know more may refer to the Tafseer of Ibn Katheer on this verse. These ahaadeeth strengthen one another, and show that this view is supported by the Sunnah. This is what was stated by Abu’l-Hasan al-Ash’ari about Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa’ah.

Imam Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Among the ahadith on this topic, some are saheeh, as was stated by more than one of the leading scholars, and some are hasan, and some are da’eef but are supported by the saheeh and hasan reports. When the ahaadeeth on any particular topic support one another in such a fashion, it provides strong evidence to prove the point. "(Tafseer Ibn Katheer 5/58).

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said, discussing the different points of view on this topic:

… They will be tested in the Hereafter by having a fire caused to appear before them. Whoever enters it will find it cool and safe, and whoever refuses will be punished. This was narrated by al-Bazzar from the hadith of Anas and Abu Sa’eed, and it was narrated by al-Tabarani from the hadith of Mu’adh ibn Jabal. The issue of being tested has been proven in the case of one who is insane and the one who died during the fatrah (interval between two Prophets) via saheeh isnaads. Al-Bayhaqi stated in Kitab al-I’tiqad that it is the correct view.

Secondly:

This view was rejected by some scholars – such as Imam Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr – who said that the Hereafter is the place of recompense, not the place of testing; there will be no commands or prohibitions in the Hereafter. This objection has been refuted and dealt with in general terms and in detail. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, Imam Ibn Katheer and others refuted it in general terms, and Imam Ibn al-Qayyim refuted it in detail, covering nineteen points.

A – As for the refutation in general terms, it may be summed up as follows: There is testing in the grave, and on the Day of Resurrection. As for the idea that the Hereafter is not a place of testing, this is true, but only after the people of Paradise settle in Paradise and the people of Hell settle in Hell.

1 – Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Accountability ends when one enters the abode of recompense, be it Paradise or Hell, or but when people are resurrected they may be tested as they are tested in al-barzakh. It will be said to one of them: Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your Prophet? Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “(Remember) the Day when the Shin shall be laid bare (i.e. the Day of Resurrection) and they shall be called to prostrate themselves (to Allah), but they (hypocrites) shall not be able to do so” [al-Qalam 68:42]. And it is proven in the books of Saheeh in more than one hadith that Allah will appear to His slaves in the place of standing when it is said: “‘Let every people follow that which they used to worship.’ So the mushrikeen will follow their gods and the believers will be left. Then the Lord will appear to them in a form other than that which they know, and they will not recognize Him, then He will appear to them in the form that they know, and the believers will prostrate to Him but the backs of the hypocrites will remain like the horns of cattle; they will want to prostrate but they will not be able to. Then he quoted the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “(Remember) the Day when the Shin shall be laid bare (i.e. the Day of Resurrection) and they shall be called to prostrate themselves (to Allah), but they (hypocrites) shall not be able to do so” [al-Qalam 68:42]. Majmoo’ al-Fatawa (4/303, 304).

2 – Imam Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Shaykh Abu ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Barr al-Namari mentioned some of the ahadith about testing that have been quoted above, then he said: The ahadith on this topic are not strong, and cannot be taken as evidence. The scholars reject them because the Hereafter is the abode of recompense, not the abode of striving or testing, so how can they be commanded to enter the fire when that is not possible for created beings and Allah does not burden any soul beyond its scope?

He answered that by explaining that the ahadith on this topic are strong, as we have quoted from him above, then he said:

As for his saying that the Hereafter is the abode of recompense, there is no doubt that it is the abode of recompense but that does not mean that there will be no accountability in when people are resurrected, before they are admitted to either Paradise or Hell, as Shaykh Abu’l-Hasan al-Ash’ari narrated was the view of Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jama’ah with regard to the testing of children. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “(Remember) the Day when the Shin shall be laid bare (i.e. the Day of Resurrection) and they shall be called to prostrate themselves (to Allah), but they (hypocrites) shall not be able to do so” [al-Qalam 68:42]. And the Sunnah, in the books of Saheeh and elsewhere, proves that the believers will prostrate to Allah on the Day of Resurrection, but as for the hypocrite, he will not be able to do that; his back will remain straight. Every time he wants to prostrate he will fall over backwards. In al-Saheehayn it is narrated concerning the man who will be the last of the people of Hell to be brought out therefrom that Allah will take his pledge and covenant that he will not ask for anything more than he has, and he will repeat that several times, and Allah will say: “O son of Adam, how treacherous you are,” then He will give him permission to enter Paradise.

As for saying: How can they be commanded to enter the fire when they are not able to do that? This does not mean that the hadith is not valid, for Allah will command the people on the Day of Resurrection to cross over the siraat, which is a bridge over Hell that is sharper than the edge of a sword and thinner than a hair. The believers will pass over it according to their deeds, like lightning, or like the wind, or like the swiftest horses and mounts; some will run, some will walk,

and some will crawl, and some will fall on their faces in Hell. What has been narrated concerning them is no less than this, rather it is greater.

Moreover, the Sunnah proves that the Dajjal will have with him a paradise and a hell (or a garden and a fire) and the Lawgiver has commanded the believers who see him to drink from that which he thinks is fire, for it will be cool and safe for him. This is akin to that.

And Allah commanded the Children of Israel to kill themselves, so they killed one another until seventy thousand were killed in a single day; a man killed his father and his brother. That was a punishment to them for worshipping the calf. This is also to difficult for anyone to do, and is no less than what is mentioned in the hadith quoted. And Allah knows best."(Tafseer Ibn Katheer 5/28).

B – Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) discussed the answer to this question in detail, as we indicated, and he added other points such as the following:

·The implication of these ahadith is in accordance with the Quran and the basic principles of sharee'ah. It gives details of what is stated in the Quran, that no one will be punished until proof is established against him. Proof was not established against these people in this world, and proof must be established against them. The most appropriate situation where proof must be established is the Day when witnesses are brought (on the Day of Resurrection) and cases are heard and proof is established, people dispute before the Lord and each one gives his proof and excuses; the excuses of the wrongdoers will not benefit them but they will benefit others.

·This view was narrated in saheeh reports from a number of the Sahabah, and no other view was mentioned in saheeh reports from them. The view that they will be the servants of the people of Paradise was narrated in a saheeh report from Salman, and there is also a marfoo' hadith concerning that, which has been quoted above, but the ahadith which say that they will be tested are more numerous, sounder and more well known.

·The command to enter the fire will not be a punishment for them; how can they be punished if they did not sin? Rather it is a test and a trial for them to see whether they will obey or disobey. If

they obey and enter it, it will not harm them and it will be cool and safe for them. But if they disobey and refuse to enter it, they will deserve to be punished for going against the command. Kings may test those who show outward obedience to them to see whether they are sincere in their obedience or not. So they may command them to do something that seems to be very difficult to see whether they are willing to do it or not; if they decide to go ahead and do it, they may let them off, but if they refuse and disobey, they may force them to do it or punish them with something more severe.

Allah commanded al-Khaleel (Ibraheem) to sacrifice his son, but His only aim was to train him to obey and submit, and to give love for Allah precedence over his love for his son. When he did that, He waived the command to sacrifice him.

As for the idea that this is not something that people can do, this has been answered by Ibn al-Qayyim from two standpoints:

1 – That they are able to do that, even if it is difficult for them. You can see the worshippers of fire rushing to throw themselves into it in obedience to the shaytan. They do not say “we are not able to do it” even though they feel such pain. The slaves of the Most Merciful, if they are commanded by the Most Merciful of those who show mercy to obey Him by jumping into the fire, how can they not be able to do that, when He is only commanding them to do that for their own benefit?

2 – If they force themselves to obey Him and seek His pleasure, that will bring them joy and will not harm them in the slightest.

He (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The Sunnah, the views of the Sahabah, and the basic principles of sharee’ah cannot be refuted on such grounds. And Allah knows best.

See: Ahkam Ahl al-Dhimmah (2/1148-1158).

This is a strong argument which explains the issue clearly. We ask Allah to bless us with beneficial knowledge and enable us to do good deeds, and to cause us to die with strong faith.

And Allah knows best.