22471 - Repetition and word order in the Qur’aan And commentary on the phrase “And fear a Day (of Judgement) when a person shall not avail another”

the question

In Soorat al-Baqarah we see that Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):
“O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you to the ‘Aalameen [mankind and jinn (of your time period, in the past)].
And fear a Day (of Judgement) when a person shall not avail another, nor will intercession be accepted from him nor will compensation be taken from him nor will they be helped
[al-Baqarah 2:47-48]
Then later on He says (interpretation of the meaning):
“O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you to the ‘Aalameen [mankind and jinn (of your time period, in the past)].
And fear the Day (of Judgement) when no person shall avail another, nor shall compensation be accepted from him, nor shall intercession be of use to him, nor shall they be helped”
[al-Baqarah 2:122-123]
and we see that the words intercession (shafaa’ah) and compensation (‘adl) are reversed, even thought both passages are speaking of the Children of Israel.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The answer to this question includes a number of points:

1 – The Tafseer (commentary) on the verse (interpretation of the meaning):

And fear a Day (of Judgement) when a person shall not avail another, nor will intercession be

accepted from him nor will compensation be taken from him nor will they be helped

[al-Baqarah 2:48]

and the similar verse (interpretation of the meaning):

“And fear the Day (of Judgement) when no person shall avail another, nor shall compensation be accepted from him, nor shall intercession be of use to him, nor shall they be helped”

[al-Baqarah 2:123]

Ibn Katheer (may Allaah have mercy on him) said (1/256):

Because Allaah reminds them of His blessing first – i.e., in the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you, and fulfil (your obligations to) My Covenant (with you) so that I fulfil (My Obligations to) your covenant (with Me), and fear none but Me” [al-Baqarah 2:40] – He then followed that with a warning of His wrath on the Day of Resurrection, and said: “And fear a Day” meaning, fear the Day of Resurrection, “when a person shall not avail another” meaning, no person will be able to help another, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And no bearer of burdens shall bear another’s burden”

[Faatir 35:18]

“Every man that Day will have enough to make him careless of others”

[‘Abasa 80:37]

“O mankind! Be afraid of your Lord (by keeping your duty to Him and avoiding all evil), and fear a Day when no father can avail aught for his son, nor a son avail aught for his father”

[Luqmaan 31:33]

This is a most eloquent statement that neither father nor son will be able to do anything for the

other.

The phrase “nor will intercession be accepted from him” means, from the kaafirs, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So no intercession of intercessors will be of any use to them”

[al-Muddaththir 74:48]

The phrase “nor will compensation be taken from him” means, no ransom will be accepted from him, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, those who disbelieved, and died while they were disbelievers, the (whole) earth full of gold will not be accepted from anyone of them even if they offered it as a ransom”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:91]

“Verily, those who disbelieve, if they had all that is in the earth, and as much again therewith to ransom themselves thereby from the torment on the Day of Resurrection, it would never be accepted of them, and theirs would be a painful torment”

[al-Maa'idah 5:36]

“So this Day no ransom shall be taken from you (hypocrites), nor of those who disbelieved (in the Oneness of Allaah Islamic Monotheism). Your abode is the Fire. That is your mawla (friend — proper place), and worst indeed is that destination”

[al-Hadeed 57:15]

So Allaah tells us that if they did not believe in His Messenger and follow him and the message with which he was sent, and they persisted in their kufr until they meet Allaah on the Day of Resurrection in that state, then the blood ties of a relative or the intercession of a person of status will not benefit them, nor will any ransom be accepted from them, even if it were an earthful of gold.

And the words “nor will they be helped” mean that on that Day no one will take pity on them and try to help them and save them from the punishment of Allaah, and as stated above, Allaah will not accept any ransom or intercession on the behalf of those who disbelieved in Him. No one will be able to save them from His punishment and no one will be able to offer them protection, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

And He protects (all), while against Whom there is no protector (i.e. if Allaah saves anyone, none can punish or harm him; and if Allaah punishes or harms anyone, none can save him)

[al-Mu’minoon 23:88]

“So on that Day none will punish as He will punish.

And none will bind (the wicked, disbelievers and polytheists) as He will bind”

[al-Fajr 89:26]

Ibn Jareer al-Tabari said: The interpretation of the phrase “nor will they be helped” is that on that day no helper will help them, just as no intercessor will intercede for them, and no compensation or ransom will be accepted from them. On that Day favouritism will be invalid and bribes and there will be no room for intercession. There will be no mutual help or cooperation among people, and judgement will belong only to the Compeller, the Most Just, with whom intercessors and helpers will be to no avail. Evil deeds with be recompensed likewise and good deeds will be multiplied. This is like what Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

But stop them, verily, they are to be questioned.

What is the matter with you? Why do you not help one another (as you used to do in the world)?

Nay, but that Day they shall surrender

[al-Saaffaat 37:24-26]

end quote (from Ibn Katheer)

Thus we know that the intercession which is stated here to be of no avail is the intercession of the kaafirs, or intercession for the kaafirs.

2 – Repetition in the Qur'aan occurs frequently, and that is for many great reasons, some of which we know, but many of which are hidden from us. For example:

1.Every phrase that is repeated may have a different meaning in each context, depending on what is mentioned before it. So that cannot be regarded as repetition.

For example, Allaah says in Soorat al-Mursalaat (interpretation of the meaning): "Woe that Day to the deniers (of the Day of Resurrection)!" and repeats it ten times, because Allaah tells various stories (in this soorah), and follows each story with this phrase, as if commenting on each story with the words, "Woe that Day to the deniers (of the Day of Resurrection)!" Each story is different from the others, so this warning is repeated for those who deny it.

2.Allaah does not vary the wording except when the meaning is different. This is only for a reason that is known to Him, and some of His creation may come to know of it, as He enables them to understand His Book [?}, or He may conceal it from them, and He is the All-Wise, All-Knowing.

3.Repetition of phrases may serve to emphasize the meaning and highlight the importance of what is being said. The more often it is repeated, the more important it is.

For more information see Qawaa'id al-Tafseer, 2/702

3 – Are there certain principles or rules with regard to the order in which things are mentioned in the Qur'aan?

It may be said – but Allaah knows best – that word order in the Qur'aan, and indeed in the Arabic language, is not based on a particular principle. Sometimes the thing that is mentioned first is that which happens first, and sometimes the thing that is mentioned first is the noblest, and sometimes it is difficult to give a reason. Based on this, we must be cautious about speaking on this topic. So we may explain that for which there seems to be a clear reason, without looking for far-fetched explanations, and with regard to cases where the reason is not clear, we refer them to the One

Who knows best about them, for speaking about Allaah without knowledge is one of the gravest prohibitions, as is obvious, and it is not permissible to interpret the words of Allaah in ways that cannot apply.

But it should be noted that when the Arabs mention things that come under the same category and mention them one after the other with the conjunction wa (“and”), this implies that there is no succession or order, so they usually do not mention one thing before another unless they care more for one of them because it is more noble, to be respected or important.

Qawaa’id al-Tafseer by Dr Khaalid al-Sabt, 1/380

4 – The reason why these verses are repeated, and the reason for the word order here in particular, is that this repetition is a reminder to the Children of Israel, and is repeated for emphasis.

Moreover in the first passage, Allaah reminds them of their duties in return for the favour that was previously bestowed upon them, which is what is mentioned in the preceding and following verses. In the second passage He reminds them of His favour by which they were preferred over the ‘Alaameen (mankind and jinn) because of their belief in the Prophet of their time, so that they might attain this virtue again by believing in the Prophet of Islam, the final Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), so that they might be among the virtuous and escape, by means of their faith, the horrors and fear of the Day of Resurrection, just as those who followed Moosa (peace be upon him) and believed in him were saved from those terrors.

Rooh al-Ma’aani by al-Aloosi, 1/373

With regard to the reason why compensation is mentioned before intercession in the second verse, and after it in the second, some of the scholars have researched this matter and mentioned two reasons:

1.It is a stylistic device aimed at creating variety in the text and avoid dullness of style.

2.As well as that, there is another subtle benefit which is: That in the first verse Allaah states that

intercession will not be accepted, and in the second verse He states that the ransom will not be accepted, so that it is made clear that neither will be accepted. Because stating that intercession will not be accepted does not imply that the ransom will not accepted, it is mentioned in the first verse after intercession so that no one will imagine that if intercession is not accepted, the ransom may be accepted. And when He states in the second verse that the ransom will not be accepted, this does not imply that the kaafirs will not benefit from intercession, so that is followed by the statement that intercession will be to no avail, so that no one will imagine that if the ransom is not accepted, intercession may be to some avail. So from the two verses we understand that neither intercession nor ransom will be accepted, because the ways in which people seek redemption and salvation from what they fear varies. Sometimes they offer a ransom first and if it is not accepted they offer intercession, and sometimes they start with intercession and if that is not accepted they turn to the ransom.

Adapted from al-Tahreer wa'l-Tanweer by Ibn 'Aashoor, 1/698.

These subtle matters which we have mentioned are only ideas that are the result of the efforts of some of the scholars who have studied these verses. So the reasons that they have mentioned may be correct or not. The style of the Qur'aan is undoubtedly the most eloquent, whether these ideas are correct or not. What really matters is to accept the wording of these verses which states that that on the Day of Resurrection no one, relative or stranger, will be able to help him, and he will look to his right and he will not see anything but that which he has sent forth, and he will look to his left and he will not see anything but that which he has sent forth, and he will look in front of him and will not see anything but the Fire. So he has to protect himself from the Fire by doing righteous deeds, even if that is giving charity with half a date, as was narrated in al-Saheehayn from the hadeeth of 'Adiyy ibn Haatim (may Allaah be pleased with him), as narrated by al-Bukhaari, 6058; Muslim 1688.

Intercession cannot benefit anyone except by Allaah's Leave, and Allaah will never give any of the kaafirs permission to intercede or be interceded for regarding being brought forth from Hell.

So people should put their trust in their Lord and none else, and ask Him to grant them the

intercession of His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

And Allaah knows best.