125716 - Why did Allaah cause the children of Israel to die with a thunderbolt (lightning) then bring them back to life?

the question

If all muslims will die once and then be resurrected on the Day of Judgment, why were the People of Israel caused to die by a lightening and then brought back to life ? (Quran 2:55).

Detailed answer

Allaah tells us in His Holy Book the story of the smiting of the Children of Israel, then how He brought them back to life after death, in two places. It is mentioned in the context of speaking of the Children of Israel and the blessings that Allaah bestowed upon them, and how they responded to those blessings with ingratitude, denial and forgetfulness.

Allaah, may He be exalted, says: (interpretation of the meaning):

“And (remember) when you said: ‘O Moosa (Moses)! We shall never believe in you until we see Allaah plainly.’ But you were seized with a thunderbolt (lightning) while you were looking.

56. Then We raised you up after your death, so that you might be grateful”

[al-Baqarah 2:55-56]

And He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“The people of the Scripture (Jews) ask you to cause a book to descend upon them from heaven. Indeed, they asked Moosa (Moses) for even greater than that, when they said: “Show us Allaah in public,” but they were struck with thunderclap and lightning for their wickedness. Then they worshipped the calf even after clear proofs, evidences, and signs had come to them. (Even) so We forgave them. And We gave Moosa (Moses) a clear proof of authority”

[al-Nisa’ 4:153]

The thunderbolt was a punishment for them for their transgressions against Allaah and their persisting in stubbornly asking questions and their arrogance despite all the signs and proof that Allaah showed to them. And despite that they asked Allaah to let them see Him plainly in this world, and they made their faith conditional upon this sign, although Allaah is far above weak eyes seeing Him in this world; rather they will see Him in Paradise. So He punished them with death by thunderbolt which seized them mightily, but because of His forbearance, forgiveness and tolerance towards His slaves, He resurrected them after death to this world, so that they might know how great Allaah's blessing to them was and give thanks to Him for giving them a respite and allowing them the opportunity once again to repent and turn back to Him. So the thunderbolt was a punishment for them and the resurrection after death was a sign and a blessing from Him so that they might learn a lesson and be reminded by it, and then give true and sincere thanks for the blessing of Allaah. Hence the verse in Soorat al-Baqarah ends with the words “so that you might be grateful”.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Katheer (may Allaah have mercy on him) says:

Remember My blessing to you, when I brought you back to life after the thunderbolt, when you asked to see Me plainly, which you and those like you cannot do – as Ibn Jurayj said.

Ibn ‘Abbaas said concerning this verse, “And (remember) when you said: ‘O Moosa (Moses)! We shall never believe in you until we see Allaah plainly in’”: (it means) clearly. End quote.

Tafseer al-Qur’aan il-‘Azeem (1/264).

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The words “And (remember) when you said: ‘O Moosa (Moses)!” mean: remember also, O Children of Israel, when you said… This is addressed to those who were alive at the time of the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allaah be upon him), but His blessings to the first of the nation are also blessings to the last of them, so it is valid to address it to the latter ones, even though this blessing came to those who went before them. And His words “ ‘We shall never believe in you’” mean: we will never follow you, and we will never believe, and we will never acknowledge that which you have brought.

His words “you were seized with a thunderbolt (lightning)” mean: death which was sent upon them.

And His words: “Then We raised you up after your death”: this is a great blessing to them, that Allaah seized them with its punishment, then He raised them again so that they might be deterred and it might be an expiation for them. Hence He said: “so that you might be grateful”, i.e. that you might give thanks to Allaah. This is explaining the reason. End quote.

Tafseer Soorat al-Baqarah 1/191

Al-Taahir ibn ‘Ashoor (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

This was an alert and a rebuke to them, hence He said: “for their wickedness.” The wickedness in question is what is narrated in Soorat al-Baqarah, when they refused to believe Moosa until they saw Allaah plainly. Their wickedness was not in merely asking to see Him, because Moosa had made a similar request on another occasion, of which Allaah tells us in the verse where He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And when Moosa (Moses) came at the time and place appointed by Us, and his Lord (Allaah) spoke to him; he said: ‘O my Lord! Show me (Yourself), that I may look upon You.’ Allaah said: ‘You cannot see Me, but look upon the mountain; if it stands still in its place then you shall see Me.’ So when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He made it collapse to dust, and Moosa (Moses) fell down unconscious. Then when he recovered his senses he said: ‘Glory be to You, I turn to You in repentance and I am the first of the believers’”

[al-A’raaf 7:143]

End quote.

Al-Tahreer wa’l-Tanweer (4/301)

And Allaah knows best.