

The Development of Akhlaq (Morality) in the Modern Era Based on the Contemplation of Parable from the 'Ad People

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Abstract

People nowadays are racing to build sky-scrapers as a benchmark of material progress while ignoring the need to build morality in each self. This situation is exactly like the people of 'Ad who were granted by Allah the blessing of the ability to build great buildings and then, Allah ended their civilization by illustrating their death as fallen date palm trees. The objective of this study is to examine the wisdom and *ibrah* (lesson) beyond the parable of the destruction of 'Ad people in Chapter al-Qamar verse 20 in the Qur'an about the fallen date palm trees. This qualitative study used content analysis from the books of well-known exegetical, scientific studies, and authorized journals. The data obtained were analyzed descriptively and thematic to obtain the results. Thus, the results show that the analogous is an insult to the state of death of 'Ad people where they were decapitated, and the lesson learned from the parable reminded that it was important to keep progressing the material successful with spiritual elements which were not associating partners with Allah in worship (*shirk*), obedience to His messengers, self-preservation and guarding the lust.

Keywords: Morality, Chapter Al-Qamar, 'Ad People, Material Progress, Parable in the Qur'an

Introduction

Akhlaq (morality) according to Al-Ghazali (1965) can be defined as a condition embedded in the soul that shows good deeds easily without the need for thought and research. When the deed that comes out is good and praiseworthy according to the *Sharia* law and rationality, then the deed is called noble morals. Otherwise, if a bad deed comes out, it is termed as bad morals. The development of morality is significant in sustaining civilization. Yet, in this modern era, there are a lot of nations that are pursuing material growth instead of moral advancement. For example, Malaysia is accelerating in building magnificent, tall, and luxurious skyscrapers such as Kuala Lumpur Tower, Petronas Twin Towers, and Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) Tower with a height of over 100 meters, and its status is already done while

Tradewinds Square Tower A, Merdeka PNB 118 Tower, and Menara M are still in the planning stages of construction. In terms of buildings and infrastructures, Kuala Lumpur shows an improvement and development, however, social and moral issues are deteriorating. According to Sinar Harian media report (2017), there are 11 areas around Kuala Lumpur named Kampung Keramat, Segambut Dalam, Cheras Baru, Jinjang, Salak Selatan, Kampung Sentosa, and Lembah Pantai, which are 'hotspot' with underage social problems such as drugs, underage sex, transit centres for illegal immigrants and more. The major factors of these problems are starting from the surrounding environment and the quality of housing.

Moreover, the city of Kuala Lumpur is popular for spreading heretical teachings such as 'Rasul Melayu' brought by Haji Kahar at the end of 2020 (Metro, 2020). Recently, Harian (2021) reported that it was famous in Kuala Lumpur with 'Agama Melayu' teachings which used the strange pronunciation of *Shahadah*. This situation is very worrying because the rapid progress of development does not promise the quality of true faith and noble personality. After all, Allah has recorded the story of 'Ad people's destruction in Chapter al-Qamar verse 20. The people of 'Ad have been endowed by Allah with the potential to build great civilization yet, crushed in just eight days and seven nights without leaving any remnant of their lives. The main cause was their bad morality development among themselves. This review aims to:

- a) obtain explanations related to the Chapter al-Qamar verse 20 which uses a parable style.
- b) support the interpretation of the verse in addition to authoritative press reports related to current issues.
- c) explain the context of the sentence based on the theme of this article which is the morality.
- d) explore the wisdoms from the parable which related to moral development.

Methodology

This article is a qualitative study that uses a case study design based on the literature review through two methods, namely data collection and analysis methods. The method of data collection is to survey the data in the exegetical books, scientific studies, journals, and authoritative websites. The researcher presents the views of the authentic scholars such as Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and Wahbah al-Zuhaili in obtaining an explanation related to the Chapter al-Qamar verse 20 which uses a parable style. Next, the researcher uses scientific studies to support the interpretation of the verse in addition to authoritative press reports related to current issues. The data that has been collected is then analyzed descriptively to explain the context of the sentence based on the theme of this article which is the morality. Lastly, the researcher made a conclusion based on the analysis that has been done.

Results and Discussion

The story of 'Ad people has been recorded many times in the Qur'an such as in the Chapter al-A'raf, Hud, Hajj, Tawbah, al-Syu'ara, al-Fajr, and more. They have also been given a specific contemptible parable by Allah in Chapter al-Qamar verse 20. The study results found that the wisdom and *ibrah* from the parable are several forms of moral development that are essential in sustaining civilization.

Not Associating Partners with Allah in Worship (*Shirk*)

The main basis of building morals in civilization is the need to believe in one God, not associate partners with Him, and accept the truth. These basic understanding must be taken care to maintain the civilization. The civilization of the 'Ad people has been described as a successful civilization in the Qur'an yet they did not adhere to this basic principle. They were the first generation to worship idols after the great flood in the time of Noah. Allah has compared the destruction of the civilization of 'Ad people to the uprooted date palm trees in the Chapter al-Qamar verse 20:

تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَارُ نَحْلِ مُنْقَعِرٍ

Translation:

Plucking out men as if they were uprooted stems of date palms.

Based on Ibn Kathir exegetical book (1994), this verse is about the people of Prophet Hud, the 'Ad people, who denied the call of *tawheed* (oneness of God in Islam) and then inflicted on them a punishment in the form of very strong wind, too cold and constantly befalling to wipe them out. Their condition of dying is chaotic and heart-breaking because it is like a date palm tree that has been uprooted everywhere. According to al-Qurtubi exegetical book (1967), the phrase "تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ" means 'that violently shakes man' which refers to the position of the wind direction. In other words, 'flying them from their place' is like uprooting a date palm tree from the ground. Some say that they dug some holes, and they were going in to avoid the gusts of wind.

According to Munir exegetical book by Al-Zuhaili (2013), this verse shows the *balaghah* (style of language) of *tasybih mursal mujmal* which does not mention the *wajhu syabbah* (characteristic related to *musyabbah* and *musyabbah bih*). Allah likened the destruction of 'Ad people to the date palm trees because their body's height parallels the height of the trees. Indeed, the very strong wind pulled them from their location as the base of a date palm tree trunk was uprooted. The wind hit them with their heads down to crush their necks and separate their heads from their bodies. This means that the corpses of 'Ad people died lying headless. This verse also means that, on the day of punishment, they tried to resist the wind but failed and even made their bodies fall and dry like dry wood as in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Dried fallen date palm trees

The word “نَخْلٍ” in this verse refers to the date tree where it has existed for a long time and has been one of the staple foods of the Prophets and is mentioned a lot in the hadith. The date palm is the oldest tree and major crop in Southwest Asia and North Africa. From a scientific point of view, the biological name for the date palm tree is *Phoenix dactylifera* which came from the Greek word meaning red or purple fruit and human finger shaped-like. Date palm trees are capable of growing up to 5000 years in areas with almost no rain, long summers with high-temperature days and nights as well as low relative humidity with adequate sunlight (Dewi et al., 2020). Scientific studies show that the nutrients contained in date fruit such as vitamins A, B1, B2, B7, folic acid, calcium, iron, magnesium, and more which proves that Islam already stated in the Qur’an and hadith that date could be medicine and recognized globally (Abidin, 2014). The date palm is closely related to human culture and civilization. The height of a date palm tree is between 15 to 25 meters, its cross sectional (thickness) is between 20 to 40 centimetres while the roots can reach up to 6 meters depth (Dewi et al., 2020).

According to the contemplation of the parable in this verse, it can be understood that the main key to the collapse of ‘Ad civilization is rejecting the *tawheed*. This parable clearly shows that Allah has the power to perish a civilization like a dry tree trunk. This matter needs to be deeply realized because, in this modern era, the deeds and wrongdoings that have been committed by the people of ‘Ad seem to be recurring.

Obedience to the Messengers’ Teachings

Allah has sent down a messenger for each of every nation as a guidance and reminder of the painful punishment if they disbelieve in *tawheed*. Therefore, the second basis of moral development is obedience to the teachings of the prophets. The people of ‘Ad chose not to obey the teachings and even ridiculed it. Those are tribes from the previous Arab tribes and the descendants of the lineage of Prophet Noah, namely ‘Ad ibn ‘Aus ibn Iram ibn Syalikh ibn Arfakhsyaz ibn Sam ibn Nuh (Karim, 2016). The Messenger who was sent to them was Prophet Hud, who had the same lineage as the people of ‘Ad. His full name is Hud ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Rabah ibn al-Khulud ibn Ad ibn ‘Aus ibn Iram ibn Sam ibn Nuh. They lived around the years 2450-2320 BC and the Prophet Hud died at the age of 150 years. They settled in the province of al-Syih or Ahqaf which is a sandy region and is said that it is located between Yemen and Oman. Through the verse 20 in Chapter al-Qamar, they have a height like a date palm tree and a strong figure. They were divided into two generations, and the first generation built a civilization with extraordinary potential where they could sculpt mountains easily and built castles. Apart from that, they are also blessed by Allah with farms, livestock, and springs (Karim, 2016).

Allah narrated further about the bad morals of ‘Ad people towards Prophet Hud when he conveyed the call to accept *tawheed* in the Qur’an. This story has been recorded in Chapter al-A’raf verses 65 to 72 which means:

“And to the ‘Ad [We sent] their brother Hud. He said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. Then will you not fear Him?"(65) Said the eminent ones who disbelieved among his people, "Indeed, we see you in foolishness, and indeed, we think you are of the liars."(66) [Hud] said, "O my people, there is no foolishness in me, but I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds."(67) I convey to you the messages of my Lord, and I am to you a trustworthy adviser (68) Then do you wonder that there has come to you a

Reminder from your Lord through a man from among you, that he may warn you? And remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah and increased you in stature extensively. So, remember the favours of Allah that you might succeed (69) They said, "Have you come to us that we should worship Allah alone and leave what our fathers have worshipped? Then bring us what you promise us if you should be of the truthful."(70) [Hud] said, "Already have defilement and anger fallen upon you from your Lord. Do you dispute with me concerning [mere] names you have named them, you and your fathers, for which Allah has not sent down any authority? Then wait; indeed, I am with you among those who wait."(71) So We saved him and those with him by mercy from Us. And We eliminated those who denied Our signs, and they were not [at all] believers" (72)

These verses show how bad the morality of 'Ad people toward the Messenger of Allah and only a few of them believed in Prophet Hud and they were saved from this punishment. This group that has been saved by Allah is the second generation of 'Ad people who came from the descendants of Hazilah Binti Muawiyah (Karim, 2016). The bad attitude of the 'Ad people is being highlighted in modern society now and even more worryingly, some people openly insult the Prophet Muhammad on social media by uploading insulting portraits, and vile words, and rejecting his call for *tawheed* (BERNAMA, 2021).

Self-Preservation and Guarding the Lust

Civilization advancement should be manifested with good morals that are based on self-preservation and lust. The wisdom from the Chapter al-Qamar verse 20 shows the end of the civilization of 'Ad people tragically even though they are advanced in the construction of great buildings. They had built a great city of Iram where the pillars were majestic and high that no one could match the structure of their buildings at that time and no civilization in the world could resemble the buildings in the city of Iram. The 'Ad people lived in the area which was previously fertile and productive with vegetation and then there was a change in its climate until become a desert (Karim, 2016). The 'Ad people maximize their abilities and this does not help them to preserve themselves from the world and control lust, as they were being cruel and arrogant. Allah has recorded the arrogance of the people of Ad in Chapter Fussilat verse 15 which means:

"As for 'Ad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said, "Who is greater than us in strength?" "Did they not consider that Allah who created them was greater than them in strength? But they were rejecting Our signs".

Allah also rebuked the 'Ad people that the greatness they possessed could not help them escape from the decree of Allah's punishment as in Chapter al-Syu'ara verses 128-129 which means:

"Do you construct on every elevation a sign, amusing yourselves (128) And take for yourselves palaces and fortresses that you might abide eternally?" (129)

Finally, the civilization of 'Ad people collapsed when they were hit by a strong wind that blew sand until it covered them with a thickness of 12 meters depth (Karim, 2016). This kind of phenomenon of natural disasters is often happening in the 21st century, especially the

development of skyscrapers nowadays is accelerating as if it is repeating the life history of the 'Ad people.

Parallel in Material and Moral Progress

The strength and superiority of 'Ad people have been recorded again by Allah in Chapter al-Fajr verses 6 to 8 which means

“Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with 'Ad (6) [With] Iram - who had lofty pillars (7) The likes of whom had never been created in the land?” (8)

Their material progress does not bring any good for themselves except the blessings of the mortal world then Allah continues narrating their bad morals in verses 11 to 14 in the same chapter which means:

“[All of] whom oppressed within the lands (11) And increased therein the corruption (12) So your Lord poured upon them a scourge of punishment (13) Indeed, your Lord is in observation” (14)

The verses also show that the 'Ad people included along with the people of Thamud and Pharaoh who were both previously great civilizations but chose to do damage and reject the truth then ended with despicable destruction. This means their advancement of material and morals are imbalanced. Allah sent the wind to blow the people of 'Ad as recorded in Chapter al-Qamar verse 19:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمٍ نَحْسٍ مُّسْتَمِرٍّ

Translation:

“Indeed, We sent upon them a screaming wind on a day of continuous misfortune”

The word “ريح” in the above verse means a very strong and cold wind that befell the people of 'Ad (al-Zuhaili, 2013). This wind is the army of Allah that can destroy their civilization without letting any of them remain. Some interpreters say that the nature of the wind is a punishment for the disbelievers and able to cut off the head, knock the neck, enter the whole body, throw them and smash them to death. The word “صَرْصَر” means a sound that is very loud like an eagle sound caused by the strong wind (Alkhaleej, 2016).

From a scientific point of view, the wind is formed from differences in space pressure in the atmosphere and it is a meteorological cycle that often occurs on earth. The wind that results from the first 1 to 2 kilometres above the ground is called the friction layer or planetary boundary layer (PBL). PBL is defined as the exchange of momentum vertically, releasing heat and moisture due to the impact of the soil surface. Wind speed varies as does the level of wind height due to friction on the surface. The rough or slippery surface level is a factor in measuring the wind momentum effectively soaking up the ground. For example, dense forests and mountainous areas where the soil surface is rougher could reduce the effects of strong winds. If the wind passes on the surface of a slippery area (fewer trees area), the wind speed will increase more significantly between 1 to 3 meters. The wind will emit noise as a result of the thickness of the PBL. With a wind speed of at least 1 meter per second, the sound that will be produced is as loud as 3 hertz (Walker & Hedlin, 2010). A horrible death punishment befell the people of 'Ad where their corpses were headless. Headless death in the body can cause severe bleeding and changes in the respiratory system because the

airways in the brain are severed, which can lead to sudden death. In Chapter al-Haqqah verse 7, Allah says means that the strong winds that pounded the people of 'Ad were imposed continuously for eight days and seven nights to be able to kill the entire of 'Ad people.

Therefore, material progress only does not guarantee that a person is saved from the wrath of Allah, especially in this modern era, there are a lot of things that can lead the individual to sin even though the technology is now more sophisticated. Allah looks at the piety of His servants, not at the advantages and material possessions they have.

Conclusion

As Muslims who have been blessed with the revelation of the Qur'an as a guide for life, this contemplation of the parable of Chapter al-Qamar verse 20 brings mankind to think about a civilization destroyed by Allah like the uprooted palm trees in such a short period. Their attitude of choosing to associate partners with Allah, denying the teaching of Messengers, not preserving themselves and lust by acting arrogantly and boasting of their existing strength as well as the imbalance of material progress and spiritual progress are the main causes of the destruction. Therefore, the best civilization is rise along with material progress and moral development to get Allah blessing and avoid His wrath.

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