

Allah is "Fis-Sama" (Above the Heaven) : Is it the Belief of The Pharaoh or Musa Alayhis-Salam ?

Prepared by: Um Abdullah al-Misawi
for : as-salaf.com

Allah Ta`ala said -translation of meaning-:

{Fir'aun (Pharaoh) said: "O chiefs! I know not that you have an ilâh (a god) other than me. So kindle for me (a fire), O Hâmân, to bake (bricks out of) clay, and set up for me a Sarh (a lofty tower) in order that I may look at (or look for) the God of Mûsâ (Moses); and verily, I think that he (Mûsâ) is one of the liars." } [28:38]

And said- translation of the meaning-:

{And Fir'awn (Pharaoh) said: "O Hâmân! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways; The ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the God of Mûsâ: But verily, I think him to be a liar." } [40:36-37]

Pharaoh used to claim divinity, and deny Musa's call that there exists a deity other than him (the pharaoh), and he wanted to prove this to the people, so he ordered his minister Haman to establish a lofty palace (a building which reaches high in the heavens) so he may reach the ways of the heavens and its doors, to look at Musa's (peace be upon him) God that he claims exists. So, was pharaoh's choice to climb the heavens based on his belief of where Musa's God is ? Or was it because Musa –alayhi As-Salam- told him that his Lord is above the Heavens ?

As for saying that the belief that Allah –Azza wa Jal- is above the Heavens is that of the pharaoh's, and not the belief of Musa –peace be upon him-, is a claim that is refuted by the Quran, Sunnah, and reason.

As for the Quran, Allah said -translation of meaning-:

{Do ye feel secure that He Who is above the Heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up by the earth when it shakes?} [67:16]

And the Imams of Sunnah have clarified that "who" in {He who is above the Heaven} refers to Allah Azza wa Jal.

And **in the authentic Hadith**, Mu'awiyah Ibn al-Hakam said:

“I had a maid-servant who tended my goats by the areas of Uhud and Al-Jowwaniya. One day, I passed that way and found that a wolf had carried a goat from her flock. I am a man from the sons of Adam. I felt sorry as they (human beings) feel sorry. so I slapped her a slap, then I came to the messenger of Allah (Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) and he made me feel what I've done was something grievous, I said: " should I not grant her freedom oh Messenger of Allah? ".

He said: **"Bring her to me."**

I brought her to him, then he said: **"Where is Allah?"**

She answered saying: " Above the Heaven (fi as-sama)"

He said: **"Who am I?"** she said: "The Messenger of Allah".

He said: **"Free her, for she is a believer."** [Sahih Muslim]

In the Hadith, the Messenger of Allah –Sallallahu alayhi wa Sallam- testified that she is a believer when she stated this belief (that Allah is above the Heaven). If the belief that Allah is above the Heaven is considered kufr (disbelief), it would have been an obligation upon him to notify her of that, and not Acknowledge her on a belief that is kufr.

As for using one's intellect, the Pharaoh said to the people that he believes that Musa –alayhi assalam- is lying when he said that there is a deity other than Pharaoh, and he built the high building to prove that Musa's deity doesn't exist. If pharaoh's act was based on his belief, then it wouldn't be a valid proof, because one can't prove someone else's claim to be wrong through his belief! He has to prove it through the claimer's own belief, so it must be according to Musa's belief, which is Allah Azza wa Jal being above the Heavens, so he built the tower to try to reach the doors of the heavens to prove to the people that Musa -alayhi assalam- is lying, as he claims.

Also, if the act of Pharaoh was against Musa's belief, then Musa -alayhi assalam- would have refuted it by denying that he believes Allah to be above the Heaven, and he would have told him that what he is doing is a useless act, because he (Musa alayhi assalam) never claimed that his God is above the Heavens, Rather he believes that He is not there. But Musa didn't do so.

Salafs' and Scholars' Statments regarding this verse:

1. **Yahya bin Sallam (d. 200 H.)** said in the interpretation of the second ayah: **"{and I (pharaoh) think he is a liar} there is no one above the Heaven, he deliberately lied."**(1)

2. [Al-Harith Al-Muhasibi \(d. 243 H.\)](#) said : (**{But verily, I think him to be a liar}** in what he said to me about Him (his God) being above the Heaven. So he (pharaoh) sought him where Musa said He was, even though he believed that Musa -alayhi assalam- was a liar. And if Musa -alayhi assalam- had told him that He (Allah) was everywhere by His Essence, he (pharaoh) would have sought Him on earth or in his house and his body, and wouldn't have prided himself with building a very high tower.) (2)

3. [Uthman ad-Darimi \(d. 280 H.\)](#) : “In this verse there is a clear illustration and an apparent indication that Musa was calling Fir`awn (pharaoh) to acknowledge that Allah is above the heaven, that is why he (pharaoh) ordered to build the high tower, and wanted to see Him.” (3)

4. [Ibn Jarir At-Tabari \(d. 310 H.\)](#) said in tafsir of the ayah: “**{and I think he (Musa)}**, in what he says about having a deity that he worship's above the heaven, and that He (Allah) is the one who supports him and grants him victory, and that He is the One who sent him to us; **{is one of the liars}**” (4)
And he said, explaining the second ayah : “**{and I think he is a liar}** he's saying: ‘and I think Musa is lying in what he says and claims that he has a God above the Heavens who sent him to us’.” (5)

5. [Ibn khuzaimah \(d. 311 H.\)](#) said: “And in his saying **{ But verily, I think him to be a liar }** is evidence that Musa has told him that his Lord –Azza wa Jal- is high and above.” (6)

6. [Abu Ahmad Al-Karaji \(d. 360 H.\)](#) said regarding the first ayah: "It is a proof against the ones who claim that Allah is Himself in the world, everywhere, and denies Him (Allah) being Himself above the Heavens, and His Knowledge in the world; for it is impossible that the Pharaoh (Fir`awn) would say this unless Musa -alayhi assalam- told to him that His God is above the Heavens and not the earth. If the Pharaoh denied Allah being above the Heavens and affirmed Him to be in the world, then those people (i.e. who claim that Allah is everywhere) have agreed with the Pharaoh in his saying. And if he denied Him (Allah) to be above the Heavens and to be in the world together, then they have went against Musa -alayhi assalam- and against all the Prophets, the people, and all religions. And I do not know a falsehood in the world except that this (belief) is worse than it, we seek refuge to Allah from misguidance." (14)

7. [Abu al-Layth As-Samarqandi \(d. 375 H.\)](#) in his Tafsir "Bahr al-Uloom" : “Allah said: **{and I think he is among the liars}** meaning: I think Musa in what he is saying that there is a deity above the Heaven is from the liars.” (7)

8. [Abu Sulaiman Al-Khattabi \(d. 388 H.\)](#) said in "Shi`ar Ad-Deen":
"And He (Allah) said, narrating about Fir'awn (Pharoah) that he said: **{O Hâmân! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways; The ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the God of Mûsâ}** so the aim of the disbeliever occurred in the direction that Musa told him about, that is why he didn't look for Him in the height of the earth or its width, nor did he descend to the lower layers of the earth. so it indicates, as we recited from these ayat, that Allah Subhanahu is above the Heaven (fis-sama), mustawen (i.e. made Istiwa) above the Throne, and if he was in every place, there would be no meaning to this specification (i.e. to search for Allah in direction above), and no benefit in it. *And it has been the habit/practice of the Muslims, people of knowledge and laymen, to make duaa to their Lord, while invoking Him, to raise their hands to the Heavens, and that is because it is widely known to them that their Lord Who is invoked is above the Heavens (fis-sama) Subhanahu.*" (15)

9. [Abo Uthman As-Sabuni \(d. 449 H.\)](#) said: (And Allah –Subhanah- told about the damned Pharaoh that he said to Haman: **{"O Hâmân! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways; The ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the God of Mûsâ: But verily, I think him to be a liar."}** and he said this because he heard Musa –Alayhi assalam- mentioning that his Lord is above the Heaven, do you not see that he said: **{But verily, I think him to be a liar.}** meaning Musa's saying: There is a deity above the Heaven. And the Scholars of the Ummah, and the Imams of the Salaf –may Allah have mercy upon them- did not differ in that Allah -Ta`ala- is over His Throne, and His Throne is above His Heavens.” (8)

10. [Ibn Abdul-Barr \(d. 463 H.\)](#) said : “so it proves that Musa –Alayhi assalam- used to say: ‘My Lord is above the Heaven’, and the pharaoh thinks him to be lying.” (9)

11. [Sa`d bin Ali Az-Zanjani \(d. 471 H.\)](#) said in his explanation of his poem on aqeedah: "And He (Allah) informed that Fir`awn (the Paraoh) said: **{"O Hâmân! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways; The ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the God of Mûsâ: But verily, I think him to be a liar."}** and Fir`awn understood from Musa that he affirms a God above the Heavens so he (pharaoh) wanted to reach Him through a tower, and he accused Musa of lying about that, and our opposer did not recognize Allah to be above him by His Essence's existance, so he was less capable of understanding than Fir`awn." (13)

12. [Abul Qasim Isma`il Al-Asbahani \(d. 535 H.\)](#) said: “And He (Allah) told about the Pharaoh that he said: **{"O Hâmân! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways; The ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the God of Mûsâ: But verily, I think him to be a liar."}**, so Pharaoh understood from Musa that he affirms a God above the Heaven, and he even tried to look at Him by the means of his high

tower, and he accused Musa of lying in that (i.e. There being a god above the Heaven).“ (10)

13. [Ibn-Qudamah Al-Maqdisi \(d. 620 H.\)](#) said in the interpretation of the second verse: “Meaning: ‘I think Musa is lying in claiming that Allah, his God, is above the Heaven’. And the opposer in this issue denied this, and is claiming that Musa is a liar in this (i.e. that Allah is above the Heaven) by certainty. In addition, he is opposing the Lord of the worlds, implying that his truthful and trustworthy Prophet –sallallahu alayhi wa sallam- has erred; and leaving the way of the Sahabah, Tabi`een, the previous Imams, and the rest of creation. And we ask Allah to keep us safe from the innovations in religion by His Mercy, and to guide us to following his path.” (11)

14. [Adh-Dhahabi \(d. 748 H.\)](#) said: “Meaning: ‘I think Musa a liar in that his God is above the Heaven.’ And if Musa didn’t call him to believing in a God above the Heaven, he (Fir`awn) wouldn’t have said that; for if Musa said to him: ‘The God I call you to is not above the Heaven’, pharaoh’s saying would have been useless/in vain, and his building of a high tower would be insanity.” (12)

Related Articles:

[Meaning of \(fi as-samaa'\) in ayah \(67:16\) and Hadith of The Slave Girl Allah's Elevation and Istiwa above the Throne \(2\) : Statements of the Salaf](#)

-
- (1) Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Aziz by Ibn Abi Zamanin (4/134)
 - (2) Fahm al-Quran wa Ma`anihi by Al-Muhasibi
 - (3) Ar-Rad `ala Al-Jahmiyah by Ad-Darimi (p.37)
 - (4) Jami` Al-Bayan (Tafsir at-Tabari) (19/581)
 - (5) Tafsir At-Tabari (21/387)
 - (6) Kitab Tawheed by Ibn Khuzaimah (1/264)
 - (7) As-Samarqandi, Bahr Al-Uloom (2/609)
 - (8) Aqidat as-Salaf wa Ashabu-Alhadith by As-Sabuni, Tahqiq: Nasr al-Jedai` (pg. 176)
 - (9) At- Tamheed, by Ibn Abdul Bar (7/133)
 - (10) Al-Hujjah fi Bayan Al-Mahajjah, by Isma`il Al-Asbahani (2/115)
 - (11) Ithbat Sifat Al-`Uluw, by Ibn Qudamah (p.65)
 - (12) Kitab Al-Arsh, by Adh-Dhahabi (2/17)
 - (13) Ijtima` A-Juyush Al-Islamiyah `Ala Ghazu Al-Mu`atilah wal-Jahmiyah by Ibn Al-Qayyim (pg. 197-198) tahqiq: `Awad al-Me`tig.
 - (14) Nukat Al-Quran by Abu Ahmad al-Karaji al-Qassab (3/567-568)
 - (15) Ibn Al-Qayyim transmitted it in his sharh of Sunan Abi Dawud (13/35-36). Al-Qurtubi

transmitted what is between the two asterisks (*) in "Al-Asna fi Sharh Asma' Allah al Husna wa Sifateh (p. 170), Tahqiq Al-AshaHasunah, and attributed it to Al-Khattabi in "Shi'ar Ad-Deen.