Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on September 4, 2015:

"Dawah with Insight - Part 10"

Iblis, The Avowed Enemy

The story of Adam and Iblis is mentioned in seven places in the Qur’an. One such ayah is found in almost the exact middle of the Qur’an; part 15, ayah 50, “And (mention) when We said to the angels prostrate yourselves to Adam and so they did except Iblis, he was from the Jinn and he disobeyed the command of his Lord. Would you then take him and his progeny as your friends besides Me and they are to you an enemy? How evil an exchange for the wrongdoers!” (al-Kahf, 18:50). “Iblis, the Avowed Enemy” is a continuation of the story of Adam and Iblis which is part of a series on “Dawah with Insight, The Soul’s Journey from Inception to Eternity.”

Previously, we learned that Iblis arrogantly refused to honor Adam. His refusal was based on an unfounded argument put forth due to his pride and vanity. In fact, the cause of this pride was pure jealousy of Adam. “He said, ‘What! Why should I prostrate to someone You created from Mud?’ Iblis continued, ‘He said, ‘tell me, is this the one whom You have honored above me?’” (Al-Isra’, 17:61,62). One may read this declaration as if to say, “And You, O Lord, preferred this insignificant, foolish bashar (Adam) made out of mud over me? How can that be?”

What usually appears from passionate jealousy is retaliation. Iblis, hoping to be granted respite until doomsday revealed his plan, “If You were to give me respite until the Day of Resurrection, I shall most certainly, cause his descendants to follow me blindly except a few of them” (al-Isra’, 17:62). In other words, Iblis promised to subdue and overpower the children of Adam. His intent is to misguide, control and destroy his offspring.

Iblis’s rage became more intense. Acting disgracefully, ‘He said, ‘Now that You have misled me, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them on Your Straight Path, and I shall come at them from their front and their back, and their right and their left and You shall find most of them ungrateful’’” (al-A’raf, 7:16,17).

Iblis blames his failure on God, “because You misguided me” he exclaims. Unfortunately, when misfortune ensues, many people are quick to blame their woes on Allah (SWT) or on others, when in reality our pain and misery may be attributed to our own actions. “Why me O Allah?” We cry. Allah (SWT) informs, “Whatever calamity befalls you is a consequence of what your hands have done and He pardons much” (al-Shura, 42:30). Iblis was doomed because of his own actions of foolishness, stubbornness and arrogance when He refused to obey His Lord’s command.

Despite this, Iblis had the audacity to vow his revenge and made two promises. The first promise is, “I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them on Your Straight Path.” The interpretation according to classical exegetes is, “As You caused my ruin, I will sit in wait for your servants whom You will create from the offspring
of the one You expelled me for.”[1] And so Iblis pledged to sit on their straight path.

In a hadith found in the collection of Imam Ahmad, the Prophet (SAW) reported to have said, “Satan sat in wait for the Son of Adam in all his paths. He sat in the path of Islam, saying, ‘Would you embrace Islam and abandon your religion and the religion of your forefathers?’ However, the Son of Adam disobeyed satan and embraced Islam. So satan sat in the path of Hijrah (migration in the cause of Allah), saying, ‘Would you migrate and leave your land and sky? But the parable of the emigrant (muhajir) is that of a horse in his stamina.’ So, he disobeyed satan and migrated. So satan sat in the path of Jihad, against one’s self and with his wealth, saying, ‘If you fight, you will be killed, your wife will be married and your wealth divided.’ So he disobeyed him and performed Jihad. Therefore, whoever among them (Children of Adam) does this (disobeys satan) and dies, it will be a promise from Allah that He admits him into Paradise. If he is killed, it will be a promise from Allah that He admits him into Paradise. If he drowns, it will be a promise from Allah that He admits him into Paradise. If the animal breaks his neck, it will be a promise from Allah that He admits him into Paradise.

Ibn `Abbas while commenting on the ayah says, “A promise from Allah is if you disobey satan while on the straight path, you are guaranteed Paradise.”

As for the second promise, Iblis vowed to attack us from all directions. “And I shall come at them from their front and their back, and their right and their left and You shall find most of them ungrateful.” In other words, Iblis will surround us and will not miss an opportunity to misguide us. He will raise doubts in our minds regarding the very essence of our existence and the hereafter. His strength is the ability to recognize our weaknesses and exploit them.

Most people are vulnerable except the few who have strong faith and firm resolve to remain connected with their Creator, Allah (SWT). Such people who perpetually stretch out their hands toward heaven above reaching out to Allah (SWT) for His help while frequently performing salah and sajdah glorifying their Lord, the Most High are protected from Iblis. He can neither attack them from above nor below. Those are the very few who are grateful to their Lord and Iblis has no control over them. And perhaps that is why Iblis did not mention these two directions in his pledge.

To seek protection in Allah (SWT), the Prophet (SAW) taught us to say, “…O Allah, guard me from what is in front of me and behind me, from my left, and from my right, and from above me and I seek refuge in Your Greatness from being struck down from beneath me.”

In a similar fashion, in surat al-Hijr, Iblis pledged to adorn the path of evil to the offspring of Adam and make the world seem attractive, glamorous and irresistible with the overarching aim to deceive and misguide them. “He (Iblis) said, ‘O my Lord! Because you have misled me I shall most certainly lure mankind on earth and mislead them all except Your devoted servants’” (al-Hijr, 15:39,40). Contrary to his statement, “And You will not find most of them grateful,” Iblis admits that he cannot have control over Allah’s sincere and devoted servants.

Allah (SWT) replies, “He said, ‘This (devotion) is a Straight Path to Me’” (al-Hijr, 15:41). Indicating, devotion to Allah and the path of righteousness is what leads to Him and His good pleasure. He (SWT) made it very clear to Iblis, “Surely you have no authority over my servants except over those who (choose to) go astray and follow you” (al-Hijr, 15:42). In other words, the humble and sincere servants of Allah (SWT) are protected from Iblis. He cannot attack them, as Allah (SWT) declared war on those who are enemies to His friends, the faithful servants (awliya’).

This fact is explained in the hadith qudsi narrated by Abu Hurairah in Sahih al-Bukhari. According to the Prophet (SAW), “Allah the Most High said, ‘Whoever acts with enmity towards a friend (wali) of Mine, I will indeed declare war against him.’” Who is this wali? The hadith continues, “My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than performing what I have made obligatory upon him. And My servant continues to draw closer to Me with supererogatory (nawafil) (acts of worship) until I love him. And When
I love him, I shall be the hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hands with which he
strikes, and his feet with which he walks. And if he asks (something) of Me, I shall surely give it to him, and if
he seeks refuge in Me, I shall certainly grant it to him.”

Therefore, one may choose to become a friend of Allah by submitting willingly and unconditionally to Allah
(SWT), and adhering to His commands and injunctions while committing to serve Him and His deen faithfully.
It is that mutual friendship (wilaya), mutual love, and mutual remembrance of one another that entitles one
to become a sincere devoted slave of Allah who is exempt from any harm that might come from Iblis or his
agents. A fact acknowledged by Iblis himself, “except Your devoted servants.” A statement repeated in surat
Sod for emphasis, “He (Iblis) said, ‘By Your Honor, I shall most certainly misguide them all, except Your sinc-
ere (and loyal) servants’” (Sod, 38:82,83). One must keep in mind, however, that a wali of Allah, as much as
he/she is protected by Allah (SWT), does go through severe trials.

Indeed, “Surely you (Iblis) have no authority over my servants except over those who (choose to) go astray
and follow you” (al-Hijr, 15:42). As for those who choose to follow him, their promised abode is Hell. “And
verily, Hell is the promised place for them all. It has seven gates, each gate having its allotted share of
them” (al-Hijr, 15:43,44).

Allah (SWT) challenged Iblis, “He said, ‘Go away! For whoever of them follows you, then indeed Hell will be
the recompense of you all, an ample recompense. And entice whomever you can from among them with your
voice; rally your cavalry and infantry against them; share their wealth and children with them; and make
promises to them.’ And satan promises them nothing but delusion”(al-Isra’, 17,64).

So Iblis, through his agents of humans and jinn, will entice the people with his voice. According to early exe-
getes such as Ibn Abbas, a prominent companion of the Prophet (SAW), “his voice” means through musical
instruments and the noises of fun and games. Not all music is bad. Certainly, music that is seductive, vulgar,
and profane or that which leads to sinful activities such as the use of drugs, intoxication and unlawful sex is
indeed the works of satan and it appears that the overwhelming music and music concerts today fit that profile.
The noises of slot machines in the casinos among other noises are also considered the “voices of Iblis.” These
are all noises he employs to tear people away from the path of truth.

Regarding, “rally your cavalry and infantry against them,” this refers to satan’s troops from men and jinn who
engage in unlawful and unjust wars causing much bloodshed and havoc. Satan and his troops helped assist the
polytheists in their fight against the believers at the battle of Badr[3]. Today, we witness this phenomenon in
the use of sophisticated weaponry such as drones, missiles, bombs, and other lethal weapons of destruction
used by oppressive powers to subjugate nations and kill innocent people.

As for, “share their wealth and children with them” again, according to Ibn Abbas, refers to wealth and property
acquired by false, impermissible and unlawful means including usury and interest or wealth spent on what is
unlawful. As for the sharing of satan in children, it could be through having children out of wedlock. It could
also be through giving such names to children that are suggestive of polytheistic attributes such as Abd al-
Shams, etc. The superstitious practices of making children wear charms and beads to ward off evil are also
among the ways to let satan share in one’s children. It could also mean to nurture and bring up one’s children
through unlawful sources of earnings.

Iblis will never stop making false promises, “And satan promises them nothing but delusion.” In spite of all
these challenges, Allah (SWT) insists, “Surely, you shall have no authority over my (true) servants. And suffi-
cient is your Lord as a Disposer of affairs” (al-Isra’, 17,65).

The story of Adam and Iblis is a very important story to learn and reflect on. It helps us understand the genuine
struggle between good and evil. Only sincere and devoted slaves of Allah (SWT) come out victorious. The sad
part is that Iblis is quite successful in deceiving people, as Allah informs us, “And indeed Iblis was correct in
his assessment of them, for they all followed him except a group of (true) believers” (Saba’, 34:20).

This implies that the vast majority of people have either been fooled or deceived. They have become victims of satan consciously or unconsciously. It must be noted that no matter the circumstance, people exercised their own free will when performing sinful acts. It will become manifest that Iblis truly had no authority over them. Only true believers, the awliya’ and sincere servants of Allah who consciously choose to be on the side of Allah (SWT) will be spared from satan’s influence and power. Iblis has no authority over them.

In the end, Iblis will take his abode in Hell along with those who deserve to dwell with him. The people whom he deluded and misguided will then realize they were his target. They will avenge Iblis and rush toward him to seek revenge, but he will push them aside and deliver his final speech, “And satan will say, when the matter is decided, ‘Surely, Allah promised you the promise of truth and I too promised you but I failed you. I had no power over you except that I called you and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with God before.’ Verily, the evildoers will have a painful punishment’” (Ibrahim, 14:22).

Iblis is our greatest trial. “And he had no authority over them except that We might know those who believe in the Hereafter from those who are in doubt about it. And your Lord observes everything” (Saba’, 34:21).

We must take away the following from the story of Iblis; envy and jealousy are forbidden in Islam. (According to a prophetic tradition, one may only envy someone who is given knowledge of the Qur’an or wealth spent for the cause of Allah.) We must never blame the misfortune we create on God. We must remain zealous and endure the hardships while on the straight path. Remember that the path of righteousness is a thorny path. We must never lose focus on Allah and the hereafter as our target. We must remain faithful and be among the sincere and devoted slaves of Allah (SWT).

Finally, we must always be cognizant of the whisperings of satan. “And should satan entice you with temptation then seek refuge in God. He is the All Hearing and the All Knowing” (Fussilat, 41:36). “And say (O Prophet), ‘O my Lord! I seek refuge with You from the whispers of the devils, and I seek refuge with You lest they come near me’” (al-Mu’minoon, 23:97,98).

[1] Ibn Kathir
[2] ibid
[3] Al-Anfal, 8:48