

# The Quran and its Message

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Joseph A Islam [www.quransmessage.com](http://www.quransmessage.com)

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

## PUNISHMENT OF THE GRAVE (AZAB-E-QABR)

*Joseph A. Islam*

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According to the Quran, there is **no such concept as a 'punishment in the grave'**. This is a concept completely alien and unsupported by the Quran. This concept is found primarily (with all its details) in [Islamic secondary sources](#).

From a Quran's perspective, the evidence seems overwhelming that at the point of death, one will become aware of the 'truth'. Then one will enter 'Barzakh', a quintessential state of 'sleep' where all concept of time will be lost. When one finally awakes, they will be confronting the Day of Judgment. The time lapse will feel as if one had **only** slept for a small part of the day when in truth, they would have tarried all the way to the Day of Judgment.

Before we take a look at the verses, an immediate question should arise:

**What would be the purpose of an appointed Day of Judgment if after death, one were to receive their punishment in their graves before the trial had even taken place?**

Conviction before trial is not a concept of justice and God is the most Just. In effect, this would render the Day of Judgment meaningless, a fundamental belief posited by the Quran underscored by numerous Surahs and verses. God repeatedly informs His creation that He will never be unjust to his slaves and not an atom's weight of injustice will take place. All actions will be recorded in a clear record (10:61; 34:3; 99:7-8; 4:40)

Furthermore, we note the following from the Quran.

## FROM THE MOMENT ONE DIES AND ARE SUBSEQUENTLY RAISED, IT WILL FEEL LIKE A MOMENTARY TIME LAPSE

### 017:052

"It will be on a Day when He will call you, and you will answer (His call) with (words of) His praise, and you will think **that you tarried but a little while!**"

### 030:055-56

"On the Day that the Hour (of Reckoning) will be established, the transgressors will swear that they **tarried not but an hour**: thus were they used to being deluded! But those endued with knowledge and faith will say: "**Indeed ye did tarry, within God's Decree, to the Day of Resurrection, and this is the Day of Resurrection: but you - you were not aware**"

### 010:045

"One day He will gather them together: (It will be) as if they had tarried **but an hour of a day**: they will recognise each other: assuredly those will be lost who denied the meeting with God and refused to receive true guidance"

### 046:035

"Therefore patiently persevere, as did (all) messengers of determination; and be in no haste about the (Unbelievers). On the Day that they see what they were promised, **(it will be) as if they had not tarried more than an hour in a single day**. (Yours is but) to proclaim the Message: but shall any be destroyed except those who transgress?"

### 079:046

"On the day that they see it, it will be as though they had not **tarried but the latter part of a day or the early part of it**"

Similar wisdom is imparted in other verses:

- The sleepers of the cave slept for many hundreds of years (God knows best the exact period) but they felt they had only slept for a little while **(18:19)**
- A man slept for a 100 years but he only felt like that he slept for a part of a day **(2:259)**

## THE DAY OF JUDGMENT IS ONLY A BLINKING OF AN EYE AWAY

In the context of the above verses, it becomes clear what is meant by the following verse which completely resonates with the theme of the Quran. At the point of death (which can come upon any of us at a stroke) and till the Day of **raising**, it is but a blink of an eye.

### 016:077

"And to God belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth, and the matter of the Hour (of Doom) **is but as a twinkling of the eye, or it is nearer still**. Indeed! God is Able to do all things"

## WHEN ONE DIES, THEY ENTER 'BARZAKH' - HUMAN CONCEPT OF TIME IS LOST

023:100

"That I may do right in that which I have left behind! But nay! It is but a word that he speaks; and behind them is a barrier (**Arabic: Barzakhun**) until the day when they are raised."

وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

**Barzakhun**

Illustration - Joseph Islam

010:045

"And on the day when He shall gather them together, (when it will seem) as though they **had tarried but an hour of the day**, recognising one another, those will verily have perished who denied the meeting with God and were not guided"

## AT THE POINT WHEN YOU DIE, THE ACTUAL TRUTH (OF PURPOSE) WILL BE KNOWN ESPECIALLY FOR DISBELIEVERS

006.093

"And who is more unjust than he who forges a lie against God, or says: It has been revealed to me; while nothing has been revealed to him, and he who says: I can reveal the like of what God has revealed? and if you had seen when the unjust shall be in the agonies of death and the angels shall spread forth their hands: Give up your souls; today **you shall be recompensed with an ignominious chastisement because you spoke against God other than the truth and (because) you showed pride against His communications**"

## A MISQUOTED VERSE

Regrettably, without reconciling the Quranic narratives in full and due to beliefs stemming from popular traditions, one often finds use being made of isolated Quranic verses to authenticate doctrines not taught by the Quran.

With regards the example of Pharaoh, the following verse is often cited to justify the concept of 'punishment in the grave'.

#### **040:046**

“In front of the Fire will they be brought, morning and evening: and (the sentence will be) on the Day that Judgment will be established: "Cast ye the People of Pharaoh into the severest Penalty”

**If read in context, it becomes absolutely clear that this is a reference to the Day of Judgment.**

#### **040:047**

“And when they shall contend one with another in the fire, then the weak shall say to those who were proud: Surely we were your followers; will you then avert from us a portion of the fire?”

For this reason given the context, it is difficult to accept 40:46 as a reference to a ‘punishment in the grave’. Mutual disputes between the people of Pharaoh in the fire clearly indicate a state of communal punishment and not a punishment in separate graves.

The very next verse provides further clarity:

#### **040:048**

“Those who were proud shall say: Surely we are all in it: **surely God has judged between the servants**”

This judgment can only be one made on the Day of Judgment.

Furthermore, given the descriptive traditions which deal with punishments **in** the grave, one has to acknowledge that Pharaoh actually drowned but was later preserved in **body** (10:92) and has no grave in the sense one would commonly understand it. So the difficulty with traditional understanding continues in so much as how one then reconciles Pharaoh's punishment in the grave when his body was never buried. Clearly, the verses are misquoted out of context.

The key to understanding any Quranic theme is to remain consistent with **all** the Quranic verses.

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## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

In keeping with all the Quranic verses and with a view to remain consistent, it is clear that the Quran informs the reader that death can approach one at any point. At the point of death, one will come to know the **truth**, the possible **reality** of his actual purpose on earth. One will then enter a state of ‘Barzakh’ where all human concept of time will cease. Once awoken, one would be face to face with the Day of judgment and it would have felt that one had tarried just a short while (regardless of actual time).

This is when the **final** judgment would then begin, where **not an atom's weight** of injustice would take place (99:7-8). God’s concept of time is completely different from our own (22:47; 32:5; 70:4)

## SOME QUESTIONS:

- Is it possible that mankind, impatient as they are, have devised stories to attribute punishment to disbelieving dead ones to cover the period of existence of man? After all, why should one wait for the Day of Resurrection when it is far more comforting to know that a disbeliever is being punished incessantly till the Day of Resurrection? This is in stark contrast with the consistent message from the Quran that mankind will only be raised on the Day of Resurrection. There is no intermediate rising which will be a necessary precursor in order to feel the punishment of the grave (after death and before the Day of Judgment).
- If there was such an unjust concept of grave punishment, how could one reconcile the period of the Azaab (punishment) of someone who died as a disbeliever 5000 years ago and one that dies 2 minutes before the Day of Resurrection? It seems awfully unjust that someone who dies 5000 years ago should receive a greater period of punishment in the grave than someone who died moments before the Day of Resurrection and who may actually be a greater sinner. In parallel, it seems equally unfair to the individual born 5000 years ago that due to his period of birth, his punishment would be prolonged.
- Not everyone is buried in a grave, some are cremated, some are frozen on the tips of mountains (e.g. unsuccessful climbs), some die in aviation accidents and of course in many others ways. For those who would wish to reconcile this, a plausible explanation would be to introduce the concept of punishment in 'Barzakh', a state not confined to graves. If this line of argument is to be followed, then why is the Quran absolutely silent about punishment within this state of Barzakh. Furthermore, why does most of the [Ahadith corpus](#) dealing with this topic allude to a physical punishment in the grave? The Quran clearly states that from the point of death to one's awakening, it will feel like a mere part of a day.

Every night we are put to sleep (which in Quranic terms is expressed as death 39:42) and every morning there is a new rising. Every night, we are reminded of this 'practice run' akin to death and the final awakening, yet sadly, many remain oblivious to God's portents.

### 039:042

"God takes the souls at the time of their death and the one that does not die in their sleep. Then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back till an appointed term. Indeed in that surely are signs for a people who reflect."

[Joseph Islam](#)

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