

Surah 25:1: *Al-Furqân* and "the warner"

From http://www.christoph-heger.de/sura25_1.html

Surah 25 ("*al-furqân*"), as it was transmitted, begins with the following verse:

*tabâraka lladhî nazzala l-furqâna 'alâ 'abdihi
li-yakûna li-l-'âlamîna nadhîran*

Usually it is translated like:

Blessed be He who sent down the *furqân* on His servant
that he might be (or: become) a warner for the worlds

understanding *al-furqân* as the *Qur'ân* and the "servant" as Muhammad.

For the Arabic text in Arabic script - presumably according to the Cairo standard edition of the *Qur'an* -, together with the comment (*tafsîr*) of four traditional exegetes cf. the following:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا

Commentaries:

Ibn Kathîr:

وَلِهَذَا سَمَّاهُ هَهُنَا الْفُرْقَانَ لِأَنَّهُ يَفْرُقُ بَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ وَالْهُدَى وَالضَّلَالَ وَالْعَيَّ وَالرَّشَادَ
وَالْحَلَالَ وَالْحَرَامَ

Al-Jalâlayn:

"تَبَارَكَ تَعَالَى" الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ "الْقُرْآنَ لِأَنَّهُ فَرَّقَ بَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ" عَلَى عَبْدِهِ "مُحَمَّدَ" لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ "الْإِنْسِ وَالْجِنِّ دُونَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ" نَذِيرًا "مُخَوِّفًا مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ"

Al-Ṭabarî:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفَصْلَ بَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ , فَصْلًا بَعْدَ فَصْلٍ وَسُورَةً بَعْدَ سُورَةٍ , عَلَى عَبْدِهِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ , لِيَكُونَ مُحَمَّدٌ لِجَمِيعِ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ الَّذِينَ بَعَثَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِمْ دَاعِيًا إِلَيْهِ , نَذِيرًا : يَعْنِي مُنْذِرًا يَنْذِرُهُمْ عِقَابَهُ وَيُخَوِّفُهُمْ عَذَابَهُ

Al-Qurṭubî:

وَ " الْفُرْقَانَ " الْقُرْآنَ . وَقِيلَ : إِنَّهُ اسْمٌ لِكُلِّ مُنْزَلٍ ; كَمَا قَالَ : " وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى وَهَارُونَ الْفُرْقَانَ [" الْأَنْبِيَاءُ : 48] . وَفِي تَسْمِيَّتِهِ فُرْقَانًا وَجِهَانٍ : أَحَدُهُمَا : لِأَنَّهُ فَرَّقَ بَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ , وَالْمُؤْمِنِ وَالْكَافِرِ . الثَّانِي : لِأَنَّ فِيهِ بَيَانَ مَا شَرَعَ مِنْ حَلَالٍ وَحَرَامٍ حَكَاهُ النَّقَّاشُ .

This traditional understanding presupposes the understanding of the word *nadhîr* as "warner". Both suppositions, the identification of *furqân* with the *Qur'ân* and the understanding of *nadhîr* as "warner", however are erroneous.

As you may see, both dictionaries agree that *furqân(â) / purqân(â)* has the meaning of "liberatio" ("liberation"), "salvatio", "salus" (both meaning "salvation"), "redemptio" ("redemption") and especially "pretium redemptionis" ("price of the redemption").

As a learnt reader of my website, who is familiar with Jewish customs kindly pointed out to me, not only in Syriac (= Christian Aramaic), but also in Jewish Aramaic *furqân(â)/purqân(â)* is used in the sense of "salvation". The standard Jewish prayerbook, known as "The Complete Siddur" (*ha Siddûr ha šalem*), includes the prayer *yeqûm purqan*, "May salvation arise". According to a small explanatory footnote, provided in the presented edition, the prayer was composed [in Aramaic] in Babylonia prior to the adoption by the Jews there of Arabic as their daily language - so certainly no later than the 800s. Besides for the noun form *PRQN* the prayer contains also the verb form *yitparqûn*, "may they be saved".

יָקוּם פִּרְקָנוּ מִן שָׁמַיָא, חַנּוּן וְחַסְדָא וְרַחֲמֵי, וְתַנִּי אֲרִיכֵי
 וּמְזוּגֵי רִיחֵי וְסִיעָתָא דְשָׁמַיָא, וּבְרִיּוֹת גּוּפָא וְהוֹרָא מֵעֲלֵיָא,
 וְרַעָא חַיָא וְקִיָא, וְרַעָא דִּי לָא יִפְסֹק וְדִי לָא יִבְטַל מִפְּהוּמֵי
 אֲוִרְתָא, לְמַרְנֵן וְרַבָּנֵן, חֲבוּרְתָא קְדִישָׁתָא דִּי בְּאַרְעָא
 דְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְדִי בְּבָבֶל; לְרִישׁ כְּלֵי וְלְרִישׁ גְּלוּתָא, וְלְרִישׁ
 מְחִיבָתָא וְלְרִישׁ דִּי בָבֶל; לְכָל מְלַמְדֵיהוֹן וְלְכָל מְלַמְדֵי
 חֲלַמְדֵיהוֹן, וְלְכָל מִן דְּעָסְקִין בְּאוֹרְתָא, מִלְּפָא דְעֲלָמָא
 יְבָרַךְ יְתֵיהוֹן, יַפִּישׁ תַּיְהוֹן וְיַסְגֵּא יוֹמֵיהוֹן וְיַמְן אַרְכָּה לְשַׁנְיָהוֹן,
 וְיַחְפְּדִקוּן וְיַשְׁחִיבוּן מִן כָּל עָקָא וְיַמְן כָּל מַרְעִין בִּישׁוּן. מְרִן
 דִּי בְּשָׁמַיָא יְהֵא בְּסַעֲדֵיהוֹן כָּל זְמַן וְעָדוּן, וְנֹאמֵר אָמֵן.

May **salvation** arise from heaven. May grace, kindness and mercy – long life, ample sustenance and divine aid; physical health, perfect vision, and healthy children who will never neglect the study of the Torah – be granted to our scholars and teachers, to the holy societies that are in the land of Israel in the land of Babylon, to the heads of the academies and the chiefs of the captivity, to the presidents of the colleges and the judges of the towns, to their disciples and the disciples of their disciples, and to all who study the Torah. May the King of the universe bless them, prolong their lives, increase their days and add to their years; **may they be saved** and delivered from all the stress and disease. May our Lord who is in heaven be their help at all times; and let us say, Amen.¹

For the changing of the meaning from "redemption" through "criterion" to "revelation script" see Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans I*, Leipzig 1909, p. 34; *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Straßburg 1910, p. 23f.; A.J. Wensinck, *Enzyklopädie des Islam*, Leiden-Leipzig, 1913-1938, II, p. 126; Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1926, S. 76; *Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran*, Hebrew Union College Annual, vol. II, Ohio 1925, p. 145-227; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Baroda 1938, p. 225-229; Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, London 1926, p. 118-125; *Introduction to the Qur'an*, Edinburgh, 1953, p. 136-138; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford 1960, p. 16.

¹ *Daily Prayer Book, Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem*, tr. P. Birnbaum, Hebrew Publishing Company, New York, Morning Service for Sabbaths and Festivals, pp.377-8.

There are 7 places in the Koran where the word *fuṛqân* is used: surah 2:50.181, 3:2, 8:29.42, 21:49 and 25:1. It has already been remarked long ago that in all places but in surah 25:1 the understanding of *fuṛqân* as "salvation", "liberation", "redemption" etc.

The later and meanwhile traditional identification of *fuṛqân* with the *Qur'an* is especially odd in *surah 25:1*. It is most highly improbable that already in the - according to the views of traditional Islamic scholarship - earliest "revealed" verses the book which allegedly did not yet exist already has been addressed, even by its supposed later name.

The general evaluation of the alleged meaning "the warner" for *nadhîr* is made possible by the etymological circumstances of this word. In all Semitic languages which functioned as vehicles for the transport of the Bible (and other religious material) to Arabia - Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac - the root *n-dh-r* uniformly has the meaning of "to vow" or "that which is vowed". And so we have also in Arabic for the basic verb *nadhara*, in clear etymological relation to all other Semitic languages, the general and main meaning "to vow".

The noun *nadhîr* on account of its form *fa'îl* is a verbal adjective or noun of predominantly passive participle meaning. The Arabic dictionaries, at least partly, indeed register the primary meaning "vowed", "votive gift" or "consecrated to God" (see for instance P. B  lot, *Al-Faraïd. Arabe-Fran  ais*, 17e   dition, Beyrouth 1955, p. 817, right column), others register "warner", as does the traditional Qur'an exegesis. This peculiarity is excused with the traditional comment that in this case the word of this pattern *fa'îl* has the meaning as if it were of the pattern *muf'il* (= *mundhir*, participle active of the IV. form of *nadhara*, which duly has the meaning "warner"). See for instance Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, London-Edinburgh 1863-1893.

The same lexica on the other hand report that the feminine variant of the masculine form *nadhîr*, which reads *nadh  ra*, has the meaning "a votive gift": that which he gives who makes a vow, a child appointed by his parents by a vow to become a minister of the Church etc. (see Lane s.v.) This is quite peculiar: that the masculine noun *nadh  r* for those lexicographers should have a totally different meaning than the feminine noun of the same grammatical structure.

It can be seen from many phrases and examples of the usage of the word, how "to make someone vow" (IV. or causative form *andhara*) could change over to the meaning "to warn someone". Everybody who urges someone into a position where he has to make a vow brings this person into a difficult position and this can be paraphrased as "to warn him". But at the same time it becomes clear that "to warn" is not the real and basic meaning although it can - and this only with the causative (IV.) form *andhara* - get this secondary meaning in some cases.

Since *nadh  r* is a verbal adjective/noun of the basic (I.) form *nadhara* - and not the causative (IV.) form *andhara* - it should originally not have had the meaning "warner", but the same significance as registered for the feminine form *nadh  ra* (which also can be understood as a nomen unitatis of the masculine noun), namely "votive gift" or "sacrifice". There is actually no text from pre-Islamic times where *nadh  r* is used with the meaning "warner". Passages in [Old Arabic poetry](#) - taking aside the question of its genuinness - on the contrary use the word in its etymologically correct meaning "something voted", "voted gift", "devoted one" etc.

In the end we come to the original meaning of 25:1, namely:

Blessed be He, who sent down the redemption on His servant
that he might be (or: become) a sacrifice for the worlds.

Now 25:1 displays the central Christian teachings on Jesus Christ: "sent down" (John 1), "as votive sacrifice" (Eph. 5,1; Hebr. 10,10.14) "for the redemption" (Eph. 1,7 and often) "of the world" (John 3,17f.).

Additionally, the *rasm* of *'âlamîna* can be read as dual. And the dual "the two worlds" is theologically precise and correct since Christian theology sees the redemption brought about by Christ extending to the world of the living as well as to the world of the dead.

As a corollary we may remark: Also this verse displays the signs of the old pre-Islamic parts of the Qur'an, namely rhyme and metric pattern, as soon as one reads it as vernacular Arabic:

*tabâra*ka lladhî nazzala l-furqâna
'alâ 'abdah
li-yakûna li-l-'âlamîna nadhîrâ

Blessed be He, who sent down the redemption
on His servant
that he might become a sacrifice for the (two) worlds.