

Section 2: The Destruction of Saba

Surah As-Saba- Verse 10

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا يَا جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ وَالنَّارَ لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ

10. “And certainly We gave David an excellence from Us, (saying:) ‘O’ mountains! Sing you (the praise of Allah) along with him, and (you) the birds (too), and We softened the iron for him,”

Since in the previous holy verse the words were about the penitent servant, and we know that this quality has been mentioned in some verses of the Qur'an¹ about David, the Divine prophet (as), and, Allah willing, we will explain it later.

Therefore, it is better that a part of the story of this great prophet and his son, Solomon, should be explained as a sample, and the former discussion might be completed.

By the way, it can be a warning for all those who neglect the blessings of Allah, and when they sit on the throne of power, they do not obey Allah.

At first, it says:

“And certainly We gave David an excellence from Us...”

The Arabic word *ifadl* has a vast concept which envelops all of the bounties Allah (s.w.t.) had bestowed on David (as), and mentioning it in an indefinite form, is evidence upon its greatness.

David was bestowed many merits, whether material or spiritual ones, from the side of Allah that the verses of the Qur'an explain them.

Once it says:

“And certainly We gave David and Solomon knowledge and they both said: ‘Praise belongs to Allah, Who has favoured us above many of His believing servants’.”²

In another occurrence, the Qur’an emphasizes particularly on their awareness from animals’ communication and it refers to it as a great favour, where it says:

“...‘O’ people! We have been taught the languages of the birds, and we have been granted of everything; verily this is the manifest favour’.”³

The different miracles, which will be mentioned in the commentary of the verse under discussion, are a part of those favours. Moreover, the beautiful song, the ability of judging justly, which is referred to in Surah Sad, are counted as another part of this divine favour. And most important of all is the favour of prophethood and messengership that Allah granted to David.

However, after this ambiguous hint, the holy Qur’an explains it, and a part of the spiritual favours and some things of the material favours of David are detailed as follows:

“...(saying:) ‘O’ mountains! Sing you (the praise of Allah) along with him, and (you) the birds (too)...”

The Arabic word *’awibbil* originally is derived from the term /ta’wib/ in the sense of preponderance and turning the sound in the throat of a person. This Arabic term is sometimes used in the sense of repentance, too, because its reality is returning unto Allah.

All the particles of the world, of course, entirely say the glorification of Allah and praise Him, whether someone like David does the same with them, or not, yet the privilege of David was in this that at the time of singing loudly and changing his inward murmuring into outwardly singing in the same way that concerning the glorification of pebbles in the Prophet’s hand has also been mentioned in the Islamic narrations.

Imam Sadiq (as) in a tradition said:

“Verily David went out (to the farms and deserts) while he was reciting Zabur, and when he was reciting Zabur there was no mountain, no stone, and no bird but murmured it with him.”⁴

Next to mentioning this spiritual favour, the Qur’an refers to a material favour, where it says:

“...and We softened the iron for him,”

It may be said that Allah taught David, in a miraculous way, how to soften the iron in a manner that he could produce some thin but strong iron bars for waving and making a coat of mail.

Or it may be said that before David, in order to defend in the battles, the plates of iron were used which were both heavy and when they fastened them to their bodies, they were so stable and inflexible that

made the strivers very inconvenient.

Until then, none could make anything like armour from some stable narrow iron bars that could be put on easily over the body like clothing and could be harmonious and soft with the movements of the body. But the apparent of this holy verse shows that it was by the command of Allah that iron became miraculously soft in the hand of David.

It does not matter that the same One Who gave the property of softening the iron to the hot furnace, gave the same property in another form to the David's fingers. Some Islamic narrations have pointed to this meaning, too.⁵

In a tradition it is cited that Allah sent revelation to David, saying:

“You are a good servant save that you get your sustenance from public treasury.”

Then David wept for forty days (and asked Allah to lead him somehow). So, Allah softened iron for him and he made armour... and in this way he did not need to use from public treasury.⁶

It is true that the use of public treasure is for those who serve the society without demanding any wage, and remove the important difficulties, but it is better that a person both deliver this service and, if it is possible for him, subsists through manual labour, David wanted to be such a kind of outstanding servant.

However, David utilized this ability that Allah had granted him in the best way, i.e., making a means used in the Holy war for protection against the enemies. He never profited from it in the ordinary means of life, but on the contrary, according to some narrations, besides running his own simple life, he spent a part of his income as a charity for the needy.⁷

In addition to all of these things, there was another benefit in this job of his which was counted as a manifest miracle for him.

Some of the commentators have said that Luqman came to David when he was weaving the first armour. David was changing iron into iron bars and formed them as numerous rings and joined the rings into each other.

This scene attracted Luqman's attention very much. He fell into a deep thought while he was still watching and saying nothing until when David finished weaving the armour.

He stood up and put the armour on and said:

“What a good defensive means it is for fighting!”

Luqman, who had found out the final aim, said:

*“Silence is wisdom, but there are a few persons who do it.”*⁸

Surah As-Saba- Verse 11

أَنْ أَعْمَلَ سَابِغَاتٍ وَقَدِّرَ فِي السَّرْدِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحاً إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

11. “(Saying unto David): ‘Make wide coat of mail, and measure well the links, and do righteousness, verily I see what you do’.”

Martial technology must be at the service of righteous deed (not for oppression, cruelty and occupying others’ lands).

In this holy verse, there is an explanation for David about making armour, and also there is a very expressive command from Allah in this regard.

It announces:

“(Saying unto David): ‘Make wide coat of mail, and measure well the links...”

The Arabic term */sabiqat/* is the plural form of */sabiq/* in the sense of ‘a complete wide coat of mail’, and in Arabic the phrase */’isbaq-i-ni’mat/* also means ‘affluence of bounty’.

The Arabic word */sard/* originally means: ‘weaving some rough things such as armour’. The Qur’anic sentence: */wa qaddir fis-sard/* means: to observe a suitable measure in making the rings of the armour and that how it may be weaved.

In fact, Allah orders David that he must be a lesson for all of the people of art and believing workers in the world. This is an order for firmness, stability and observing exactness in quality and quality of manufactures in a manner that the users of them can apply them easily and comfortably.

It implicitly orders David that he should make the armour wide and comfortable in a state that when the strivers put it on they do not feel that they are in prison.

The links should be neither so small and narrow that they lose their flexibility, nor should they be so big and abnormal that sometimes the sword-point, a dagger, a javelin, and an arrow can pass it through. The whole affairs of it must be measured and proportionate.

Shortly speaking, Allah not only gave David the main substance regarding to the sentence:

“...We softened the iron for him”,

but also taught him how to form and weave the coat of mail in order that he could provide a complete production from this ‘substance’ and ‘form’.

At the end of the verse, Allah addresses David and his family and says:

“...and do righteousness, verily I see what you do’.”

At the beginning of the verse the addressee was only David, but at the end of the verse he and his family, or he and his people, are addressed, because all of these things are as a preparation for righteous deed, and these are a means alongside that path that both David and his family could enjoy them.

One of the dimensions of the righteous deed is that carefulness must be observed in manufactures from every point of view, and a complete and useful product must be delivered so that any defective state and imperfection on it might be avoided.

This probability also exists that the addressee in this statement had been David and all those who utilized his hand woven armour, indicating that they should use this defensive means in the path of righteous deed, not in the way of oppression, cruelty, and sin.

Surah As-Saba- Verse 12

وَلَسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ غُدُوُّهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوَاحُهَا شَهْرٌ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقِطْرِ وَمِنَ الْجِنِّ
مَنْ يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَمَنْ يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ

12. “And for Solomon (We made subservient) the wind which travelled in the morning a month’s journey and a month’s journey in the evening. And We made a fountain of molten copper to flow out for him, and of the jinn, some worked before him by the leave of his Lord; and whoever of them turned away from Our command, We made him taste of the chastisement of the blazing Fire.”

The Divine prophets have mastership (wilayah) over the world of existence and the world of genesis.

Allah made iron subservient to David and the atmosphere to Hadrat Solomon.

Next to the discussion of the merits that Allah had given to David, in this verse the words relate to his offspring, Solomon. Concerning David, the Qur’an referred to two merits, while concerning his son, Solomon, it mentions of three great merits.

It says:

“And for Solomon (We made subservient) the wind which travelled in the morning a month’s journey and a month’s journey in the evening...”

It is interesting that for the father He made subservient a rough and extraordinary firm and stable substance, but for the child, his son, He made subservient a very tender being, while both of them are effective, useful and miraculous. He softens the stable substance for David, and for Solomon He causes the tender waves of the wind to become active and severe.

The smooth of the wind is never a barrier that it performs some important actions. It is the wind that moves some huge gigantic ships over the surface of the oceans; turns millstones, and balloons to float in the sky like aeroplane.

Yes, Allah made subservient this tender substance, with this amazing power for Solomon.

That how the wind moved Solomon's things, (such as his throne or his carpet), is not clear to us. We only know there is nothing difficult and complicated for the Power of Allah.

When man, with his very little power, can send balloons, and today the great gigantic aeroplanes with hundreds passengers and many heavy means can be sent to the depth of the sky, how is it difficult for Allah to move Solomon's things by the wind?

Which factor was it that protected Solomon (as) and his means from falling down or from the air pressure and other difficulties resulted from the movements in the heavens?

This is also among the problems the details of which are not clear for us, but we know that there have been many of these kinds of supernatural events in the history of the Divine prophets, though, unfortunately, some ignorant persons, or the aware enemies, have mixed them with some superstitions in order to change the main feature of these issues into a bad form.

So in this regard we suffice to the same amount that the Qur'an has mentioned.⁹

The Arabic word */quduww/* often means the time toward morning, opposite to the word */rawah/* which means the time toward evening, when animals return to their abode in order to rest.

But it is understood from relationships in the context that in this verse the Qur'anic word */qudaww/* is the first half of the day while */rawah/* means the second half of the day.

Then the concept of the verse is that from morning until noon a man could pave a way equal to one month travelling that the travellers of that time might pave; and in the second half of the day he could travel the same distance, too.

Then the Qur'an refers to the second Divine bounty given to Solomon.

It says:

"...And We made a fountain of molten copper to flow out for him..."

The term *'asalna'* is derived from /sayalan/ in the sense of 'to flow', and the word /qitr/ means 'copper'. The objective meaning of it is that Allah made this metal molten for him and, like a spring, caused it to flow.

Some commentators have meant the word /qitr/ in the sense of brass, and, thus, for the father, David, iron was softened and for the son, Solomon, metals became molten, (but the first meaning is popular).

How was a spring of molten copper, or other metals, under the control of Solomon? Did Allah teach this prophet the way of melting these metals in a vast measure by the way of miracle and inspiration? This was also one of graces of Allah unto this great prophet.

And finally, the verse refers to the third bounty of Allah unto Solomon, i.e., making subservient a group of jinn, where it says:

"...and of the jinn, some worked before him by the leave of his Lord..."

"...and whoever of them turned away from Our command, We made him taste of the chastisement of the blazing Fire."

As it is also manifest from its name, jinn is a being which is not realized by the sense. It has intellect and power, and, as it is understood from the verses of the Qur'an, it is responsible to fulfil some divine duties.

There are many superstitious stories cited about jinn, but if we omit these superstitions, the principle of its existence and the proper qualities that have been said about jinn in the Qur'an, it is a matter which never contrasts the knowledge and intellect. More details about this subject will be delivered in the commentary on Surah Jinn, No. 72, Allah willing.

It is noteworthy that for running a vast government in a very vast country like the country of Solomon, many factors and agents are needed, but the most important of them all are three factors which have been mentioned in the above verse:

The first is a means of rapid movement by which the chief of the country can constantly go here and there and become aware of all parts of his country.

The second is the first original main material staffs which can be used for supplying necessary means of people's life and different manufactures.

And, finally, some active human members are needed who can take enough benefit from those material stuffs and give them the necessary quantity to them so that the various needs of the country from this view can be removed.

We see that Allah granted these three merits to Solomon, and he, too, took benefit from them in a good way for people's welfare, and furnishing the country and its security.

This subject does not allocate to the time of Solomon and his government, and being careful of it is necessary not only today but always and everywhere for correct running of a country.

Surah As-Saba- Verse 13

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ
اعْمَلُوا ءَالَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ

13. “They made for him whatever he wished of places of worship and mages and basins (large) like water-troughs and (cooking) cauldrons fixed, ‘Exercise thanks, O family of David! But few of My servants are grateful!’”

This holy verse refers to a part of important productive activities of some jinns who accomplished them by the command of Solomon, where it says:

“They made for him whatever he wished of places of worship and mages and basins (large) like water-troughs and (cooking) cauldrons fixed...”

A part of those things were related to spiritual issues and Divine services, and another part of them proportionate to bodily needs of men, as well as the members of his large troop and workers.

The Arabic term **/maharib/** is the plural form of **/mihrab/** which philologically means ‘house of worship’, or some great buildings and castles which have been built to be used as temple.

This word is also used in the sense of the highest seat of an assembly, or the first part of a mosque.

That which today is called **/mihrab/** (prayer niche) is in fact a new meaning that has been taken from the main root.

However, since this word is derived from the term **/harb/** in the sense of fight, the reason why the worship temples are called **/mihrab/** is that it is the place of fighting against Satan and carnal desire.¹⁰

Or it is derived from the Arabic word **/harb/** in the sense of ‘clothes’ which is taken off from the enemy’s body in the battle field, because in temple, the place of worship, man must put aside the cover of the worldly thoughts and mind dispersion from himself.¹¹

However, these active clever workers of Solomon used to arrange some great and glorious temples for Solomon (as) that were appropriate for his divine religious government so that people could easily perform their own religious worshipping duties.

The Qur'anic term ***itamathill*** is the plural form of /timthal/ which has been used both in the sense of 'portrait', (picture), and statue. There have been commented differently on this matter that the features of which beings these pictures or statues were taken, and for what purpose Solomon ordered that they should be prepared.

It is possible that they had been made as ornament, in the same manner that they are now seen in important old buildings, and even in our modern buildings, too.

Or they were produced to give some additional glory and grandeur to his organizations, since the picture of some animals, like lion, is the cause of creation of grandeur in the thought of many persons.

Upon the commentary of this verse, a narration from Imam Sadiq (as) indicates that he said:

*“By Allah, the pictures Solomon wanted to be produced were not the statues of men and women, but they were portraits of some trees and the like.”*¹²

The Arabic word ***ljifan*** is the plural form of /jafnah/ in the sense of container of food. The word /jawab/ is the plural form of /jabiyah/ in the sense of 'pool', and it is understood from this application that they provided some great vast containers each of which was like a pool for Solomon so that a large group could sit around it and eat food from it.

In some rather old times, if we have not forgotten, at the tables of food some large vessels were used for eating food by a group, and, in fact, their tablecloth was that very vessel, and it was not customary that some independent separate containers to be used as it is done today.

The Arabic word ***lqudur*** is the plural form of /qidr/ with the sense of a container in which food is cooked; and the Qur'anic term ***lrsiyat*** is the plural form of /rasiyah/ in the sense of 'steadfast' and 'fixed', and here its purpose is some cooking-pots that, because of their greatness, they were not moveable.

At the end of the holy verse, after mentioning these merits, Allah, addressing the family of David, says:

“... ‘Exercise thanks, O family of David! But few of My servants are grateful!’”

It is evident that using the divine blessings alongside the same path they are created and granted for is a kind of thanks-giving, and it is certain that those who utilize the merits of Allah generally in their own places are not so many.

Of course, the people of the truth among human beings have always been very few.

You may consider the number of the believers in comparison with the disbelievers, the guided ones with the misguided ones, the obedient ones with the zealous ones, the pious ones with disobedient ones, the just ones with evil-doers, the immaculate ones with other than them, the gratitude ones with ingratitude ones.

At the end, some dignitaries have considered three stages for thankfulness: thanksgiving by heart, which is:

(a), having consent and happiness for the blessing;

(b) thanksgiving by the tongue, which is to praise the bestower of the blessing;

(c), the thanksgiving of other limbs and organs, which is to harmonize the deeds with that blessing.

The Qur'anic term *šakur* in Arabic is an amplification form, and denotes the abundance of thanksgiving that refers to the repetition of thanksgiving and its continuation by means of the heart, the tongue, and the limbs.

This epithet, of course, has sometimes been mentioned for Allah, too, like what is cited in Surah At-Taqabun, No. 64, verse 17, which says:

“... Verily He is All-thankful, Most forbearing”,

and the purpose of thankfulness of Allah is that as much the servants pave the path of obeying Him He will involve them in His merits and graces, and He thanks them, and by His grace, He increases them more than what they deserve.

A Few Traditions Upon Thanksgiving

In a tradition narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) we read that someone asked him whether there is a limit for the thank of Allah that when a person reaches that limit he is counted thankful.

He (as) answered:

“Yes.”

The man asked:

“How?”

The Imam answered:

*“He must praise Allah for His whole blessings upon his family and his wealth; and if there is any right in the wealth He has given him he should pay it.”*¹³

Another tradition from the same Imam (as) indicates:

*“Thanksgiving of a blessing is avoidance from sins.”*¹⁴

Again in another tradition the same Imam (as) said:

“Allah, the Almighty and Glorious, revealed to Moses, saying:

‘O’ Moses! Do thank Me which is a due thank.’

Moses said:

‘How can I thank You a due true thank while every time I do thank You, You give me a new blessing for it?’

He said:

‘O’ Moses! Just now you performed thanksgiving to Me since you know that that (success) is from Me’.”¹⁵

This point is also necessary to be noted that being gratitude unto those who are a means for a bounty for Man is a kind of thanking Him. Imam Sajjad, Ali-ibn-il-Hussayn (as) says:

“When the Hereafter Day comes forth Allah, the Exalted, will say to some of His servants: ‘Did you thank so and so?’

The servant answers:

‘O’ Lord! I performed thanksgiving to You’.

Allah says:

‘Since you did not thank him, you have not performed My Thanksgiving’.”

Then, the Imam (as) added:

“The one (among you) who thanks Allah the most is the one who thanks people (for their bounties and favours).”¹⁶

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“Whoever does not thank for a small (bounty) will not thank for abundant bounties; and whoever does not thank people, will not thank Allah either.”¹⁷

It is narrated from Imam Sajjad, Ali-ibn-il-Hossayn (as) who said:

“The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

‘Verily (when) a believer is satiated from eating food, then he praises Allah, the Almighty; so He will give him a reward equal to that which He gives to him who fasts during the day and keeps vigil at night establishing prayer. Verily Allah accepts thanks-giving and loves those who are gratitude’.”¹⁸

Imam Sadiq (as) said:

*“Thanksgiving is to avoid the unlawful things, and a complete thanksgiving is that one says: ‘The praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds’.”*¹⁹

Imam Ali (as) said:

*“Do continue your thanksgiving, then your blessing will be permanent.”*²⁰

We have discussed about the reality of ‘thanksgiving’ and that how it causes the blessing to be increased and that being ungrateful is the source of its annihilation in Surah ‘Ibrahim, No. 14, verse 7.

Surah As-Saba- Verse 14

فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَى مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنْسَأَتَهُ فَلَمَّا خَرَّ
تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنُّ أَنْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ

14. “Then when We decreed death for him (Solomon) naught showed them his death except a creature of the earth devouring his staff; and when he fell down, the jinn came to know that, had they known the Unseen, they would not have tarried in abasing torment.”

The time of death is in Allah’s Power:

(“We decreed”).

Death meets even those who have prophethood and kingdom with together.

The words in this verse are about Solomon. It speaks about the wonderful and marvellous death of this great prophet of Allah. It makes this fact clear that how that mighty prophet and that powerful ruler with that glory that he had easily gave his soul to the Creator of the Soul. Even before that his body could get rest in the bed; the grips of death seized him.

Allah says:

“Then when We decreed death for him (Solomon) naught showed them his death except a creature of the earth devouring his staff..”

It is understood from both the above verse and numerous narrations that when Solomon’s death came he was standing, leaning on his staff. It was just then when suddenly death seized him and his soul went out from his body.

For a length of time he was in the same state of standing until when termite, which the Qur'an has rendered into 'a creature of the earth', ate his staff and, losing his equilibrium, he fell down on the ground. It was then that the jinn understood that if they had been aware of the Unseen they would not have remained in abasing chastisement.

The verse continues saying:

"...and when he fell down, the jinn came to know that, had they known the Unseen, they would not have tarried in abasing torment."

The Arabic term ***tabayyanat*** here is derived from /tabyin/ which usually means: 'to be manifest' (an intransitive verb), and sometimes it also means 'To become aware of something' (a transitive verb), and here the second meaning is appropriate.

It means: until that time the group of jinn were not aware of the death of Solomon and they understood that if they had known the secrets of Unseen, they would not have remained in trouble and the pain of heavy labours during that time.

Some commentators have taken the sentence with the first meaning and have said that the concept of the verse is such that after that Solomon fell the status of the jinn became manifest for human being and they understood that the jinn were not aware of the secrets of the Unseen, and it was not right that some men had such a belief about them.

The application of 'abasing torment' may be an indication to the hard heavy labours that sometimes Solomon, as a forfeit and punishment put on the shoulder of a group of jinn, else the prophet of Allah would never put anyone under pressure and punishment specially under an 'abasing torment'.

By the way, Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (as) says:

*"...If there were anyone who could secure a ladder to everlasting life or a way to avoid death, it was Solomon, the son of David (as) who was given control over the domain of the jinn and men along with prophethood and great position (before Allah)..."*²¹

Animals Work For Allah

1- A piece of the body of a cow makes a slain person alive and he introduces his killer:

"Verily Allah commands you that you should sacrifice a cow..."²²

2- A spider protects the Prophet (S) in the cave:

"If you do not help him, yet Allah has helped him already..."²³

3- A raven becomes the teacher of man:

“Then Allah sent a raven digging up the ground...”²⁴

4– A hoopoe is ordered to take the Solomon’s letter to Bilqiys:

“Go you with this letter...”²⁵

5– Birds in flocks are told to destroy the possessors of elephants:

“And send down (to prey) upon them birds in flocks.”²⁶

6– A serpent can be a means to show the legitimacy of Moses:

“...it was a clear serpent.”²⁷

7– A big fish is commanded to punish Yunus:

“Then the big fish did swallow him...”²⁸

8– Termite is the means of divulgement of Solomon’s death.

“...devouring his staff...”²⁹

9– The dog of the Companions of the Cave is ordered to guard.

“...and their dog stretching out his paws on the threshold...”³⁰

10. Four birds cause the certainty of Abraham.

“...Take four of the birds...”³¹

11. A donkey causes the certainty of Ezra to Resurrection.

“...and look at your ass...”³²

12– In Hajj, camel, cow and sheep become the symbols of Allah

“And (as for) the fat camels, We have made them for you of the symbols of Allah...”³³

13. Animals are a means of theology.

“Do they not look at the camels...”³⁴

14– Animals become the means of man’s examination.

“...Allah will surely try you with something of the games which your hands and your spears can reach...”³⁵

15- An animal can be the miracle of Allah.

*“...This she-camel of Allah is a sign...”*³⁶

16- Animals can be the means of the Wrath of Allah.

*“...The locusts and the vermin and the frogs...”*³⁷

There are several suras in the Qur’an entitled by the names of animals, such as: Al-Baqarah, Al-’An’am, An-Nahl, An-Naml, ’Ankabut, and Fil.

Surah As-Saba- Verse 15

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكَنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ
وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبٌّ غَفُورٌ

15. “Indeed there was a sign for the (people of) Sheba in their abode, two gardens in the right and the left; ‘Eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him (that you have) a pure city and a forgiving Lord’.”

Saba is the name of the cultivated land of Yemen. This name, Saba, had been the name of a great personality in that region that was chosen for this land.

The biography of this country is instructive.

After the statement of the great bounties that Allah had bestowed on David and Solomon and that these two Divine prophets acted on the duty of thanksgiving, in this holy verse there has been referred to another nation who were in a state opposite to them and they lived perhaps in the same time with them or a little after them.

They were some people whom Allah granted kinds of blessings, but they paved the way of disbelief and, consequently, Allah negated His blessings from them. Then, they became so scattered and wandered that the story of their life became a gazing-stock for the people of the world. This nation was the people of Saba.

The Glorious Qur’an has stated their instructive biography in five verses and it has pointed to some important details and specialties of their life in these few verses.

At first, it says:

“Indeed there was a sign for the (people of) Sheba in their abode...”

As we will see later, this great Divine sign originated from here that those people by utilizing the particular spatial conditions and situation of the mountains around that region, in addition to the abundant God-given talent of those people, they could control the floods, which had no result save destruction, behind a strong dam, by which they succeeded to build a very habitable country.

What a great sign it is that a means of destruction is changed into the most important means of development.

The historians are divided in the belief that “Saba” is whose name and what it is. The popular idea is that ‘Saba’ is the name of the father of Arabs of Yemen.

According to a tradition narrated from the Messenger of Islam (S), there was a man by the name of Saba, from whom ten children were born, and from every one of them a tribe from the tribes of Arabs came into being in that land.³⁸

Some believe that “Saba” is the name of the land of Yemen, or a part of it. The apparent meaning of the Qur’an in the story of Solomon and hoopoe in Surah An-Naml also shows that ‘Saba’ had been the name of a place, where it says:

“...and I have come to you from Sheba with a sure tiding.”³⁹

The situation here is that the apparent of the verse under discussion shows that “Saba” had been a group of people who lived in that region, because the plural masculine pronoun /hum/ has returned to them.

But there is not any inconsistency between these two commentaries, because it may be that at first Saba had been the name of a person, then all his offspring and his tribe were entitled by that name, and later this name was also used for their land.

Then the Qur’an refers to the explanation of this Divine sign which was given to the people of Saba. It says:

“...two gardens in the right and the left...”

The story was such that the people of Saba, by building a great dam between the magnificent mountains of that region, could store the water of the numerous floods, which caused only destruction or at least were wasted in the deserts vainly, at the back of that great dam, and by creating some windows in the dam they could take the vast store of water behind it under their own control.

Thus, they succeeded to plant and grow different things in the vast lands over there. Fakhr-i-Razi has cited a problem here, saying that the existence of “***two gardens***” is not an important thing which can be referred to as ‘a sign’.

In our opinion basically this problem is not something worthy to be discussed, because they were not two ordinary simple gardens, but they were a series of gardens joined together at two sides of a great stream which were watered from that lofty dam.

These gardens were so bountiful of fruits and blessed that, as history indicates, if a person would put a large basket on his head and at the season of fruit, he passed under these trees there he could pour so much fruit in it that after a short time the basket would be filled with fruits.

Is it not wonderful that a flood which is the source of destruction becomes the cause of cultivation? Is it not counted as a sign of Allah? In addition, an extraordinary security existed in that land which itself was counted one of the signs of Allah. This fact will later be referred to by the Qur'an.

Then the verse says that Allah told them as follows:

"...Eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him (That you have) a pure city and a forgiving Lord'."

This short sentence has reiterated a collection of material and spiritual bounties in the most beautiful form.

From the point of material bounties, they had a pure and clean land. It was clean from the various pollutions: from thieves and unjust people, from pests and afflictions, from draught and famine, and from insecurity and terror.

It has even been said that their land was clean from harmful insects, too. Their town had a clean air, a pleasant enlivening breeze, and a fertile land with productive trees.

From the point of spiritual bounty, they had the forgiveness of Allah. He would dispense with their short comings and faults and He did not punish them and He did not involve their land in misfortune.

Surah As-Saba- Verse 16

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِي أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ
وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ

16. "But they turned away (from Allah), so We loosed on them the Flood of 'Arim, and We gave them in exchange for their two gardens, two gardens bearing bitter produce and tamarisk-bushes, and here and there a few lote-trees."

Through this verse, the Qur'an implicitly says that instead of being thankful of Allah, they turned away

from Him. They counted the bounties of Allah insignificant. They considered the cultivation and security of their land very simple.

They, forsaking the affluence of bounties, became neglectful of the remembrance of Allah. Their rich people boasted to the poor and imagined them as some bothers for their own status. The explanation of this will be dealt with in commentary of later verses.

It was here that the lash of punishment was whipped on their bodies, as the Qur'an says:

“But they turned away (from Allah), so We loosed on them the Flood of ‘Arim...”

The Arabic term */‘arim/* is derived from */‘aramah/* in the sense of harshness, ill-temper, and strictness, and flood being modified by it, points to its harshness and destructiveness, and the application of the phrase */sayl-al-‘arim/* (the Flood of ‘Arim) is, so to speak, of the kind of addition of modified to the modifier.

Some commentators have rendered the Arabic term */‘arim/* into field-mice which, as a result of making holes in this dam, caused its destruction.

Lisan-ul-‘Arab introduces different meanings about the Arabic term */‘arim/* including: ‘a tiresome flood, barriers, which are built between valleys for stopping water, and also a big field-mouse’.⁴⁰

Then the Qur'an explains the later situation of this land as follows:

“...and We gave them in exchange for their two gardens, two gardens bearing bitter produce and tamarisk-bushes, and here and there a few lote-trees.”

The Qur'anic word */‘ukull/* means any kind of victuals.

The Arabic term */xamt/* means a bitter plant.

The Arabic word */‘athl/* is in the sense of ‘tamarisk-bush’.

And, thus, instead of those masses of green trees there remained only a few wild- deserted trees with a very low value that, perhaps, the most important of them was lote-tree a few of which were found among them.

The statement of these three kinds of tree which remained in that ruined region refers to three different groups of trees a part of which were harmful, some of them were useless, and some of them were of very little benefit, and on the whole they had their turning away, ingratitude and Divine punishment as a sequel, and flood, earthquake, tempest, thunder and lightning are not casual.

Surah As-Saba- Verse 17

ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ

17. “This We recompensed them for their disbelief; and do We ever recompense any but the ungrateful?”

The Divine retributions are Allah’s way of treatment and a godly law against evil doers, and they are not allocated to the People of Sheba.

As a conclusion, this verse explicitly implies that this was a chastisement that Allah gave them for their own infidelity.

The verse says:

“This We recompensed them for their disbelief...”

But in order that no one considers that this fate belongs to only this group, but its generality unto all those who have similar actions is certain, it says:

“...and do We ever recompense any but the ungrateful?”

Surah As-Saba- Verses 18-19

وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا قُورَى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ سِيرُوا فِيهَا لِيَالِي وَأَيَّامًا ءَامِنِينَ

فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَّقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ

18. “And We made between them and the towns which We had blessed (other) towns apparent and between them We had appointed stages of journey in due proportion: ‘Travel therein secure, by night and by day.’”

19. “And they said: ‘O our Lord! Place longer distances between our journeys; and they were unjust to themselves, so We made them stories and We dispersed them all in scattered

fragments. Verily in this there are signs for every patient, grateful one.”

Ingratitude causes the destruction of man’s living.

Through these two verses the Qur’an returns again to the story of Sheba and explains their story in some more detailed explanation. It refers to their punishment almost larger than before in such a way that it can be an important and instructive lesson for anyone.

It implies that Allah made their land so cultivated that not only He caused their cities to become full of bounties but also He appointed between them and the cities that Allah had blessed some other manifest cities.

The holy verse says:

“And We made between them and the towns which We had blessed (other) towns apparent...”

In fact, between them and the blessed land there were some towns joined together like a chain, and the distances between these towns were so little that from each of them the other town could be seen; and this is the meaning of the Qur’anic phrase: ***lquran zahirah/ (towns apparent)***.

Some of the commentators have rendered this phrase in another way. They say that it refers to the towns which were just manifestly alongside the way and passengers could stay well in them. Or that these towns were upon some high places and they were apparent for the wayfarers.

As for the purpose of ‘the blessed towns’ that which towns they may be, most commentators have rendered it as the towns of old Syria⁴¹, since this very meaning has been mentioned about this land in Surah ‘Isra’, No. 17, verse one, and in Surah Al-’Anbiya’, No. 21, verse 81.

But some other commentators say that the purpose of it may be the towns of “San’a” or “Ma’arib” both of which have been located in the region of Yemen, and this commentary is not so improbable; because the distance between Yemen, which is located in the most southern point of Arabia, and Shamat (Syria), which is located in the most northern point, is so much so, and had been covered with some dry and hot deserts, that rendering the verse into it seems very improbable, and, it has not been recorded in history books either.

Some commentators have also believed that the blessed lands may be the land of Mecca, which is improbable, too. This explanation was from the point of cultivation, but since only cultivation is not enough and security is its importance and basic condition, the verse adds:

“...and between them We had appointed stages of journey in due proportion:...”

“...‘Travel therein secure, by night and by day’.”

Thus, the towns had an appropriate distance, and from the point of the attack of wild and fearsome

animals of the desert, or thieves and robbers, they were also in utmost security in a manner that people could travel between them without having any provision or any mount.

They did not need to travel in groups and use some armed persons with them because of fear due to insecurity of the way, or for the fear of the lack of water and food along their way.

That who conveyed them the sentence: ***“Travel therein”***, there are two probabilities: one of them is that it was conveyed to them by their prophet, and the other is that the mute tongue of that cultivated land and its secure and safe roads were the means of conveying the sentence to them.

Preceding the word /layali/ before /’ayyam/ in the verse is for the sake of the importance of the existence of security at nights both security from the point of thieves of the way and wild animals of the desert, else providing security during days is easier.

Through the next verse, the Holy Qur’an implies that these ingratitude people in the face of those great bounties of Allah, which had encompassed their whole living thoroughly, like many other nations who lived in pleasure, were involved in pride and negligence.

Affluence of bounties and their scanty of capacity caused them to pave the way of ingratitude and deviated from the path of Truth and they became heedless of the commands of Allah.

Among their unwisely demands was that they asked Allah to appoint long distance between their journeys.

The verse announces:

“And they said: ‘O our Lord! Place longer distances between our journeys’..”

Their purpose was that Allah would set a distance between their cultivated towns and there would appear some dry deserts between them, because the rich were not willing that the poor people could travel like them and travel wherever they wished without any provision and any mount.

As if travelling was among their boasts and it was the sign of power and wealth and they desired that this privilege and superiority should be registered for them for ever.

Or comfort and welfare had made them inconvenient, in the same way that Mann and Salwa (two heavenly foods) had made the children of Israel tired and asked Allah for onion, garlic, and lentil.

Some have also guessed that the sentence:

“Place longer distances between our journeys”

may point to this fact they had become so pleasure-seeking that they were not ready to travel for the purpose of breeding livestock or merchandise and agriculture, and they asked Allah that they would

always remain at home and the time between their journeys would be increased.

But the first commentary seems best of all.

However, the verse says:

“...and they were unjust to themselves...”

Yes, if they imagined that they had been unjust to others, they were wrong. They had taken a dagger and cut their own chest asunder, and they themselves had to tolerate all the hurts.

What an interesting meaning it is!

Next to this short sentence, which is stated about their painful fate, the Qur’an implies that Allah punished them so seriously and twisted their lives so complex that it became as a matter of talk for others.

The verse says:

“...so We made them stories...”

Yes, from that furnished living and that glorious vast civilization, there remained nothing but some news talked by tongues, and a remembrance in minds, and some lines written on the pages of histories.

The verse continues saying:

“...and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments...”

Their region and towns became so ruined that they had not the ability of living there and, in order to continue their life, they had to go toward different places in different groups.

Like leaves in the season of fall, which are in the current of storms, everyone of them was thrown into a corner, in a manner that their division became a ‘proverb’ and whenever people wanted to say, for example, a group was severely scattered, they used to say:

“Like the people of Sheba and their bounties, they have scattered.”

As some commentators have said, the tribe of ‘Qasan’ went to Syria, ‘Asad went to ‘Amman, while the tribe of Khaza‘ah went toward Tahamah, and the tribe of ‘Anmar went to Yathrib.⁴² At the end of the verse, it says:

“... Verily in this there are signs for every patient, grateful one.”

Why can the patient and the grateful ones take lesson from these events? (Specially that the Arabic words: *Isabbar!* (*patient*) and *!šakur!* (*thankful*) both are in the Arabic amplification form which indicate

the statement of repetition and emphasis.)

This is for the sake that they can control their ungovernable desire by means of patience and perseverance, and they stand powerfully against sins, and because of their thanksgiving in the way obeying Allah they are prepared and vigilant.

It is for this reason that they take an example well. But those who follow their desires and are heedless unto the Allah's merits, how can they take an example from these events?

Surah As-Saba- Verses 20-21

وَلَقَدْ صَدَّقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يُوْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ
وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ

20. "And certainly 'Iblis found true his conjecture concerning them, so they followed him, except a party of the believers."

21. "And he has no authority over them, save that We would know (distinguished) him who believes in the Hereafter, from him who is in doubt concerning it, and your Lord is the Preserver of all things."

Satan cannot make people force to do something, and that they follow 'Iblis is based upon their authority and their own decision.

Belief in the existence of Hereafter is like a barrier against Satan.

These verses are, in fact, a kind of general conclusion from the story of 'the people of Sheba' which was stated in the previous verses, and we realized that how they involved in all those misfortunes and deprivations as the result of submitting to low desires and temptations of Satan.

In the first verse, it says:

"And certainly 'Iblis found true his conjecture concerning them..."

"...so they followed him, except a party of the believers."

Or in other words, the Satan's prophecy that, after denying of prostrating in front of Adam and being banished from the Presence of Allah, 'Iblis said:

“...then, by Your power, I will lead them all astray.” “Except Your servants amongst them, sincere and purified (by Your grace).”⁴³

Satan said this sentence by conjecture and guess, but finally this conjecture and guess became true, and the weak-faith people who were feeble in their will moved after him group by group.

There were a small group of believers who broke the chains of Satan’s temptations and were not deceived by his traps. They came in freely, they lived freely, and they passed away freely. Though they were scanty from the point of number, each of them matched a world from the point of value.

Ali (as) says:

*“...they are few in number, but they are great in esteem before Allah...”*⁴⁴

In relation to the temptations of ‘Iblis and those who go into the realm of his influence and those who are outside this realm, through the second verse the Qur’an points to two subjects.

At first it says:

“And he has no authority over them...”

It is we who let him and issue the permission of his arrival into the country of our mind and body.

This is the same thing that the Holy Qur’an in another occurrence from the tongue of Satan says:

“...I did not have any authority over you except that I called you and you responded me...”⁴⁵

But it is clear that after accepting his invitation from the side of some faithless and sensual persons, Satan will not stay motionless, but he will make the foundations of his domination firm on their selves.

So, in the continuation of the verse, the Qur’an adds about the aim of Satan’s freedom, as follows:

“...save that We would know (distinguished) him who believes in the Hereafter, from him who is in doubt concerning it...”

It is obvious that Allah (s.w.t.) is aware of every thing that happens in this world, from the pre-eternity to the future eternity. Therefore, the Qur’anic term *llina’lamal* (***We would know***) does not mean that He does not distinguish the believers from those who are in doubt.

The temptations of Satan must come across so that they can be distinguished, but the purpose of this sentence is the objective accomplishment of the knowledge of Allah, since Allah never punishes persons from His innate knowledge and because of their deeds in potency, but there must be provided a sense of trial, the temptations of Satan and low desires begin so that every body authoritatively and with complete free will brings out what he has in his inside than the objective accomplishment of Allah’s

knowledge appears, because there will not be any deserving of reward and retribution unless an action is fulfilled practically in outside.

In other words, no one will be rewarded or punished only because of innate goodness or innate evil, unless what is in potency appears in action.

At the end, as a warning to all the servants of Allah, the Qur'an says:

"...and your Lord is the Preserver of all things."

It says such so that the followers of Satan do not imagine that any thing of their deeds or sayings will disappear in this world, or Allah forgets it. No, never. Allah keeps and protects them all for the Day of Justice.

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1. such as Surah Sad, No. 38, verse 24
 2. Surah An-Naml, No. 27, verse 15
 3. Ibid verse 16
 4. Al-Mizan, Vol. 16, P. 390
 5. Tafsir-ul-Burhan, Vol. 3, P. 343; and Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, Vol. 4, P. 315
 6. Majma'-ul-Bayan, following the verse
 7. The commentary by Abul-Futuh Razi, Vol. 9, P. 192
 8. Majma'-ul-Bayan, Following the verse
 9. About this matter, we have also hinted out in the commentary of Surah Al-'Anbiya', No. 21, verse 81
 10. Mufradat, by Raqib
 11. Ibid
 12. Wasa'il-ush-Shi'ah, Vol. 12, Tradition 1
 13. 'Usul-i-Kafi, Vol. 2, Part Thanks, Traditions 10 and 12
 14. Ibid
 15. Ibid, Tradition No. 27
 16. Ibid, Tradition No. 20
 17. Mustatraf, Vol. 1, P. 236
 18. Ibid, P. 237
 19. Bihar, Vol. 68, P. 40
 20. Jami'-ul-'Ahadith-ush-Shi'ah, Vol. 13, P. 545
 21. Nahj-ul-Balaqah, sermon 182
 22. Surah Al-Baqarah, No. 2, verse 67
 23. Surah At-Taubah, No. 9, verse 40
 24. Surah Al-Ma'idah, No. 5, verse 31
 25. Surah An-Naml, No. 27, verse 28
 26. Surah Al-Fil, No. 103, verse 3
 27. Surah Al-'Araf, No. 7, verse 107
 28. Surah As-Saffat, No. 37, verse 142
 29. Surah Saba, No. 34, verse 14
 30. Surah Al-Kahf, No. 18, verse 18
 31. Surah Al-Baqarah, No. 2, verse 260

32. Surah Al-Baqarah, No. 2, verse 259
33. Surah Al-Hajj, No. 22, verse 36
34. Surah Al-Qashiyah, No. 88, verse 17
35. Surah Al-Ma'idah, No. 5, verse 94
36. Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7, verse 73
37. Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7, verse 133
38. Majma'ul-Bayan, following the verse
39. Surah An-Naml, No. 27, verse 22
40. Lisan-ul-'Arab
41. Syria, Palestine and Jordan
42. Tafsir-i-Qurtabi, and Tafsir-i-'Abul-Futuh-Razi, following the verse under discussion
43. Surah Sad, No. 38, verses 82-83
44. Nahj-ul-Balaqah, saying No. 147
45. Surah 'Ibrahim, No. 14, verse 22

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